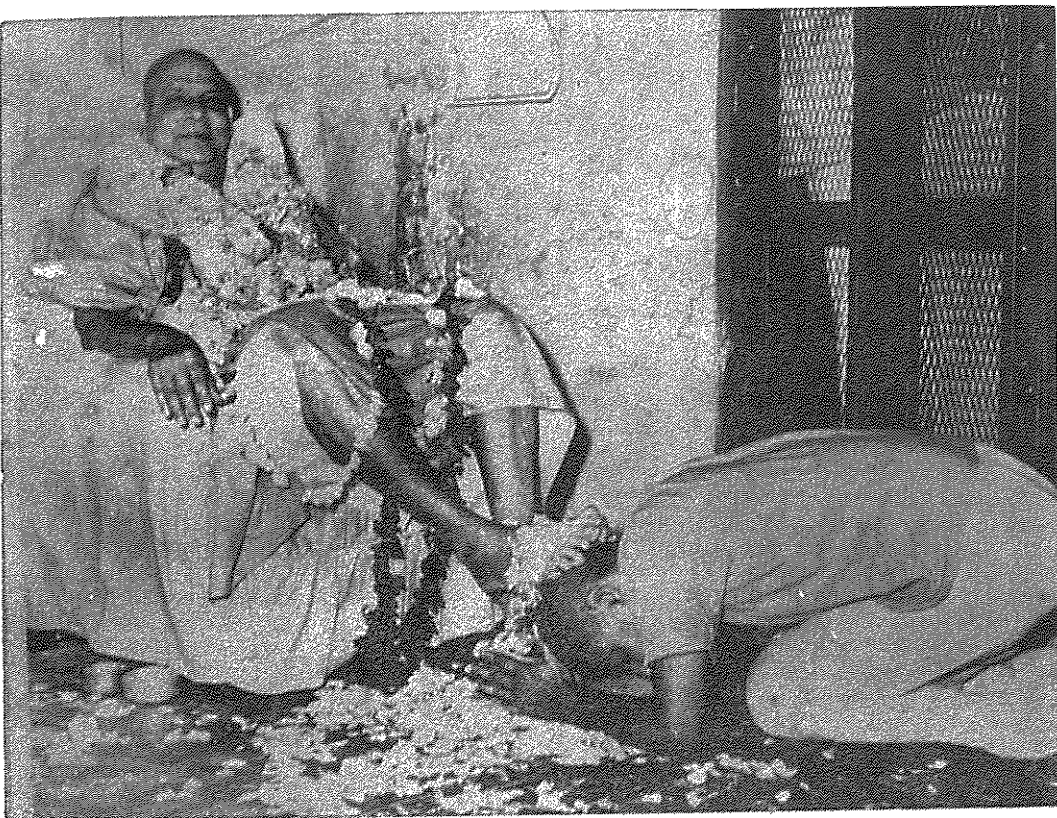


A SEASON'S HARVEST 1977



Gurudev Sivananda blessing Swami Venkatesananda

Volume One

A SEASON'S HARVEST

VOLUME ONE

TALKS BY SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

Edited By Jill Charoux

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A SEASON'S HARVEST

(Volume One)

Part I

In Rishikesh in May 1977 Swami Venkatesananda gave an inspiring series of eleven talks on the life and teachings of Swami Sivananda.

pp. 1 - 83

Part II

The emphasis on Swami Sivananda's teachings was continued in a series of four talks given by Swami Venkatesananda at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in Mauritius in September 1977.

pp. 83 - 109.

Part III

In a series of five talks at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in Mauritius in November 1977 Swamiji spoke on the essence of the Yoga Vasistha.

pp. 109 - 136.

CORRECTION: On page 4, para 3: It is "baboo" (meaning "worldly man") and not "baboon". Par 5: It is "Narayana Hari" not "Narayanaya".

CAUTION: There may be other such "mishearings" by the transcriber!

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LIVING AT THE FEET OF GURUDEV IN THE ASHRAM:
A CONTEMPLATION OF HIS LIFE AND HIS TEACHINGS.

RISHIKESH - MAY 1977

I

His life and his teachings were not different except in certain respects. When we say the teachings, it is better not to confuse the teachings with what is published in his books. Most of the books were transmission of traditional teachings, for instance a lovely book called, "Practice of Nature Cure". That is the transmission of the teachings concerning nature cure, not necessarily his own teachings. Even they received his spirit in as much as they were neither fanatic nor exclusive, but the practice of nature cure. In that Sri Gurudev gave the traditional teachings flavoured by his own spirit.

His own teachings were quite another thing. They were entirely his life, an extension of his own life. And so when we discuss the life and teachings of Gurudev, we are really contemplating the spirit that lives with us as Sri Gurudev.

I have no doubt that his presence is still here. We may not be able to see him now only because our vision is limited; it may even be as it was in those days when, on certain occasions, he wouldn't come out. So even though one may not be able to see the physical presence, the spiritual presence is ever here.

There is one fundamentally vital question that should occur to us concerning which we should be quite clear. Gurudev was a phenomenon and so are you. Is it possible by listening to his life or his teachings to become like him? The thought itself is absurd! I suppose we can imitate him,

that's not difficult - but it's not the reality. This is one aspect. Another aspect is more important, that he himself was not an imitation. You may wonder, so what? In that there was a teaching! When he was in Swarg Ashram he was only an ordinary sadhu. At the same time, around him there lived others of his own age or even younger who had acquired fame and name and a great following because they were specialists. One was a great scholar; well it was too late for Swami Sivananda to become a Sanskrit-scholar - he was thirty-six or thirty-nine when he came here. There was another who could be imitated, he was a mouni. All of us can imitate this. You can all become mouni sadhus because it only demands that you should not talk. Swami Sivananda was not tempted to become a mouni or an ascetic or even a Kundalini yogi. He didn't pattern his life on somebody else. What you are looking for is self-realisation, not "other-imitation". That is the example. Imitation is a waste of time, absolutely useless, apart from the fact that he himself could not be imitated.

He was too great. You could perhaps in a whole lifetime of contemplation on the Guru catch a glimpse of one aspect of his personality. When you think you have understood him you suddenly discover that there are too many other aspects which are baffling. So it was not possible to imitate him - a second Sivananda could not be produced by the same Brahma, not in the same kalpa! Then one might ask, "What is the sense in listening to these stories, these teachings, if they cannot be imported, not just imparted, but imported - lock, stock and barrel?"

Perhaps some of you have read some scriptures; The Bhagavad Gita or The Ramayana or The Yoga Sutras. There are doctrines in these texts whose words seem to be simple enough for the brain to transmit. The Bhagavad Gita is one such scripture; the words are quite simple, and the brain suggests that the translation is easy; but then the meaning is impossible! For one who has not seen an elephant it is impossible to describe an elephant. We read the doctrines in the Gita, the Upanishads etc.; do we know what they mean? The brain can provide the dictionary meaning, but this is not it. What is

the meaning; for example, of samadhi? There is a brilliant translation of the Yoga Vasistha, the only one of its kind, which was produced about 150 years ago. Every time the word "samadhi" occurred in the original text it had been translated "anaesthesia"! The translator probably looked up a dictionary which told him "samadhi" is "anaesthesia", "where one is not affected at all by the external influences." That meaning is misleading! It doesn't lead me to nowhere, it leads me to somewhere else, where I do not want to go! Reading these scriptures, how do you know that this is possible? How do you know these teachings are real or valid? Look at him! As it says in the Narada Bhakti Sutras, "Scriptures are validated by saints". That is the only way scriptures can be verified, otherwise they are just words, meaningless words which can be misunderstood. So here we are on the horns of a dilemma.

I need the example of Sri Gurudev to understand the scripture. Yet I am afraid I cannot imitate him. In any case he himself didn't like it. So why do we listen to his life and teachings? In order that the spirit of Sri Gurudev may enter us and become life. Is it possible for us to inhale the spirit of Gurudev's life, as we inhale air, and let it enliven us? If we listen in that spirit, I am sure we shall all be blessed and benefitted.

There is however a problem. First of all to come to grips with the concept of Guru. Some of you who have not had his darshan have one difficulty- you have not seen him and therefore you depend upon someone else's interpretation, and please remember that whoever it is that interprets Sri Gurudev can only give you a passing picture. Nobody could describe him totally. Nobody has seen him totally. This is your problem.

Our problem was even more complex and complicated. First of all though we saw him constantly he was such a dazzling infinity that every day we saw a different facet. Sometimes one facet was almost contradictory to another. You are left wondering which is true. The whole thing was true, and in that he represented the infinite in its truest spirit. You see smoke going up and you see water flowing down, both of

them part of the same infinity. There is no sense in asking if the infinite seems to be confused! The question is absurd. Similarly with Swami Sivananda himself, one day he did this, another day he did something quite the contrary - like fire going up and water flowing down - both of them are the infinite, not just part of the infinite. They constitute the infinite, another facet of this infinite - that was the problem.

When it comes to understanding this sadhana, there is more difficulty. He had passed through an austere life, he had renounced the world. Many of us didn't have any world to renounce. I didn't have to renounce my wife - she is not here! I didn't marry. Most of us have nothing very serious to renounce. Some of us have renounced poverty, some have renounced boredom, some have renounced unpleasant situations. He had something else to renounce, and having renounced all that, he subjected himself to tremendous austerity. We came as young men. We had never been subjected to any hardship. Most of us came when the ashram had already been established. All that you had to do was to go there, knock, and somebody said, "Yes. I'll give you some tea".

Once Swami Sivananda was very angry. What is the present post office was then the office, and he used to work there at a small chair and table. Three of us were sitting in front of him, working, when for some reason he said, "Ha, what is this? You have all become like baboons. You came here as sadhus, but you all become like baboons".

We didn't have tables and chairs in those days but still we had something. "When the bell rings you go and have your tea, have your lunch. Do you know what the hard life of a sadhu means?" We just looked at him. Then he went on, "You want to be a swami - do you know how to beg?" "No Swami." "Come on, I'll show you!" He took one of those little towels, tied it around his hand. "Hold your bag like this - and you must have a little vessel, and when you go near the people you must open this and say, 'Narayanaya' and keep quiet. Have you done that?"

I said "No" - of course not, the kitchen was established when we came. He was so wild that two of us decided to go

begging the next day down into Rishikesh! You know we went along a road singing and received some alms from some houses and so on, but that is not begging. At the back of our minds was the sure guarantee of food. All that we had to do was to go round the shopping centre of the village; it was very small in those days, and even if we collected nothing we could go back to the ashram and have our food. What would be the feeling in your heart when you were not sure of that? That is different! That is begging. This is merely showing.

That was when he pointed out that our life is a mendicant's life. You must learn not to depend upon these things, but to depend upon, for want of a better word, God.

Though on this occasion he was stern in his admonitions, on most occasions he behaved like our mother. No, not even like a mother, more like our grandmother. He loved feeding us - it was non-stop. This is one respect in which his teachings dramatically and diametrically differed from his life. He underwent all sorts of hardships, but he would not let you ever think of it. He was very abstemious in his eating habits, but nothing gave him greater pleasure than to see people eat. He was a very big man with an enormous hand and even when he gave you just a little, it was enough for lunch and dinner. Usually he wasn't very sophisticated in this - he didn't serve you the prasad on a plate or a leaf, he gave it from his hand to your hand, saying, "Eat, eat it now!" He would tell you a very common sense reason why - "Otherwise the monkeys will take it away from you - so better eat it now" right in front of him. You had to eat and as soon as your hands were empty, something more would come. Every time a visitor brought a basket of fruits it went round. Half an hour later another visitor came along; it went round again. Some visitors used to sort of complain - not really complain: "Swamiji, you said, 'Eat a little etc!', but here you keep feeding us!" "Huh! When you go home you can fast." That was the attitude.

Therefore for most of us who lived with him it was very difficult to follow his example. He was fond of austerities, yet he almost discouraged people from leading an austere life. He had a complete double personality, being a teacher - if you

listened to him and responded to him, then probably he would teach you; but more often than not he was a grandmother, not even a mother.

To be with him and to watch him and pierce through all these to perceive the spirit of Sri Gurudev was difficult! One has to watch, observe minutely, in order to see what this spirit may be!

Firstly, let's look at the problem of the Guru. Unfortunately for us this has become a problem. Why is this so? We often repeat a very beautiful and inspiring verse, "Ishvaro gururatmeti murtibheda vibhagine, vyomavad vyapta dehaya sri dakshina murtaye namah."

"Ishvaro gururatmeti murti bhedavibhagine!" One alone appears as this trinity, the three words God, Guru and Self indicate exactly one truth. They are not three different things, but one truth, and we who are ignorant of the Self or of God, how do we pretend to understand the Guru? One who does not understand God does not understand the Guru. One who does not understand the Self does not understand the Guru.

When this ignorance is there, there is only mis-understanding. And therefore we often appoint, disappoint, and dismiss the Guru. This is a famous pastime. I don't know if you have come across people who go about saying, "Ah you are my Guru - today!" As long as you scratch my back, as long as you satisfy my whims and fancies, you are my Guru. And a few days later I'll disappoint you. The disciple appoints the Guru - the disciple disappoints the Guru. All these sound too much alike!

This is the question, to know who the Guru is. Who is the Guru in relation to me? Is it possible for an ignorant, immature person to answer this satisfactorily? We are all emotional, sentimental beings; we have our own inner images, we have our own ideas about the Guru. He must have a nice flowing beard and sit erect all the time!

If you had had Gurudev's darshan you would never have seen him rigidly erect. He sat curved forward slightly - he used to call it Hanuman asana. Even sitting erect like this

suggests a certain vanity, a certain arrogance.

Because we have our own ideas about what a yogi or Guru should be like, when we come to him we don't recognize him. If you do not know yourself you cannot know the Guru. Guru is the manifestation of the grace of God, evoked by your aspiration! The three are closely interlinked, they are three facets of the same being. If there is no aspiration there is no Guru.

It is this inner aspiration, directed to the Omnipresent Being, that appears in front of you as the Guru. Only then can you recognize the Guru. It is therefore discipleship that is important. It is possible to say that the spirit of discipleship itself is the Guru. If that spirit of discipleship is there you will recognize the Guru immediately because that is the Guru. Naturally, in order to verify this inner spirit, it is necessary to go and resort to the lotus feet of a living Satguru and follow him. All that is important but the first aspect of this Guru is within, the spirit of discipleship. And that is what we saw constantly in Gurudev.

A young man had come from South Africa in about 1946, spent some time with us, and then the time came for him to return to his own country. Gurudev was seated in the old office when this man came in, sat down and looked at Gurudev, and started shedding tears. When Gurudev saw a sincere person like this, his face shone. There was something extraordinary in all this, a radiance, a bliss which is indescribable. It was God, grandmother, father, all these things rolled into one. He looked at this young man with such compassion, such love, such affection, that it is impossible to put it into words.

Then he said, "Ah, what is it?" "Swamiji, I have to go back to South Africa." "Huh, you must go back to South Africa."

Looking at Gurudev's face, smiling, cheerful, compassionate, he was consoled. Then he said to Swamiji, "Where do we get Gurus like you in South Africa?" "Ah - you don't get Gurus like me in South Africa. Hah - you don't get Gurus at

all, Achaah." Then he fixed his gaze on the young man's eyes and said, "It is easy to find a Guru - it is very difficult to find a disciple!"

That is what he was throughout his life, he was a disciple. I know what he used to write occasionally, "I have accepted you as my beloved disciple and I will guide you." He may have written this, but when you came in front of him he would treat you as his Guru. The moment you entered the ashram, he saluted you, prostrated to you, bowed down to you. He never used the second person singular in regard to anybody - even to small children. Everyone was an elder, everyone was worshipful, adorable - everyone was his Guru.

It was one of those comic situations, when the Supreme Being himself used to sit or lie down in the satsang. Somebody used to deliver a lecture - some silly man who had probably not even entered the spiritual path would discourse on Vedanta and other spiritual topics. Swamiji used to say that he listened to everybody's lectures with great keenness. He was a keen student - an eternal disciple, an eternal student! Even when a little child stood up and sang a song or recited a poem, Gurudev said, "I listen extremely carefully". Even though the talk might not have substance in itself, it used to trigger a train of thought, a chain of reflection in him, and he would go to his room and contemplate thus. Many of the books were products of such contemplation. Is that possible for us - to be an eternal disciple, a genuine disciple, a serious disciple? That discipleship itself being the primary Guru, the secondary guru appears in front of us in human form. As Gurudev used to say, referring to particular people from whom he had learned, "I've learned a lot from him!"

One who had this receptivity, who was eager to listen, even to the humorous stories of one of his disciples, in order to learn, was an eternal disciple. The perfect Guru was an eternal disciple in whom the aspiration was never quenched or put out.

If that aspiration is awakened in us, if that discipleship comes to dwell in our hearts, it is then that we might come to know what Guru means. That same discipleship, that

same aspiration which is the primary Guru, by God's grace and in God's light appears to be an external human being. But first and foremost we must be perpetually burning with aspiration!

II

In the life of a jivanmukta we find what superficially appears to be a contradiction, something which defies logic. Logic is the child of the intellect as well as being the governor of the intellect; like your children, it is born of you and yet it governs you. The intellect cannot function without logic, therefore it creates logic and gets bound. The sage however is free from all that. Those of you who have devoted some thought to life, may have realised that life itself is not logical. So these two guiding lines have to be born in mind: firstly, you don't jump to any conclusions, and secondly, if there are contradictions, then that is the unmistakable sign of a liberated sage. He is not bound by anything. There is a truth which shines through him and which has to be seen. There is a fragrance that emanates from him. A fragrance of divinity that has to be inhaled like a perfume. As we inhale the life breath, can we inhale the perfume of a divinity? May it also enliven us!

Gurudev had an extraordinary attitude to the famous guru-disciple relationship. I suppose you are already familiar with these two extreme views: one says that the guru is the one that does everything, and the other claims that the guru is not necessary at all. There are some who say that not only do you need a guru but that the guru himself does everything. This is a point of view, a theory - that's all. There is the other theory, the teaching that no guru can uplift you, that a guru is absolutely useless. Gurudev was right in the middle. So in most of these issues where there are two extremes he trod the middle path. It was beautiful.

How did he do this? Those who said that the guru is not

necessary - he didn't argue with them, and if that person came to the ashram, sat there and delivered a discourse attacking all this guru business, Gurudev himself would have applauded! He was not afraid at all of any criticism, of any other point of view being expounded here, right at his own feet. And if immediately after this talk we wanted to perform pada-puja, he would sit and allow it to be done. He didn't fight or argue with them, but quietly he said, "Without a guru you may be lost". Even if you are enlightened and light is pouring out of your ears and nose, it is better to be a little humble and treat yourself as a disciple and seek a guru.

On the otherhand, there was a rather stern, tough article written by Gurudev himself entitled: Gurudom the deathly Cancer. He wrote it, had it read in the satsang, then had about 20 or 30 copies typed and sent it to all the journals that he was connected with.

Now there seems to be a contradiction. He is not supposed to be a guru and I am supposed to seek a guru - if he refuses to be my guru it is like preaching brahmacharya to the boy and insisting that the girl gets married! There was this most beautiful synthesis, a middle path. It is possible that he may regard you as the guru, but within yourself be careful. You do not even have to tell him, "Don't take me as your guru." Then you become the guru! If he obeys you he becomes your disciple and you become the guru! If you tell him, "Go away", he goes away and becomes your disciple. And if he stays, you become the guru. Never mind all this, mind your own business!

How did he put the middle path into practice? Consider his attitude to new aspirants. In the letters we drafted for him to new disciples, after signing he would with his own hand write just two or three lines, "I have accepted you as my beloved disciple". That was only the first line. The second line is the most important one. "I shall guide you and serve you nicely." You accept me as your disciple and you are going to serve me? That is the beauty. That is what I meant by saying that this is the most delicate middle path.

On the contrary, Gurudev used to talk to other people in

the ashram as if he was the disciple. Every moment Gurudev was supremely conscious, vigilant is the word, that this Gurudom did not enter his heart. A thousand people might worship, bow down to him, sing his glories, but he was not affected. This was the beautiful thing I saw.

He did not have the feeling "I am the guru" towards his disciples. His disciples could openly profess devotion to other masters. There was no problem at all. What happens if this disciple deserts you and defects to another side? It's alright. I am not a guru. It was an extraordinary thing to watch. His own disciples could be devoted to anybody. In the ashram itself there were senior disciples of Gurudev who were openly followers of other saints. That didn't make any difference to him at all! Not in the least!

But what is even more interesting - now comes the danger point - when the avowed disciples of other swamis and holy men came to him, he accepted them. One was Swami Poorna Bodh, he was one of us and probably the best of us. He belonged to another order, the Avadhuta order. In this order you don't wear clothes, you grow a beard and so on. Gurudev himself sent him to South India when his Guru's Guru was sick. When he returned here, initiated into the Avadhuta order, Gurudev said, "Stay here, it's perfectly alright." One day this swami wasn't quite pleased with his hair and beard. I am not sure whether Gurudev told him or he asked for permission. Gurudev said: "Ha, shave it off" That is a paradox again. Here is somebody who is not my disciple, I'm not the guru, so I have no business to guide him. He looks up to me for guidance and so, though he is the disciple of somebody else, I simply tell him, "Shave it all off". An extraordinary thing.

The master had transcended all limitations so that for a moment he was the avadhuta swami, there is no difference at all spiritually, between that swami's guru and him. The whole thing was beyond all distinction. It seemed to be an absolutely open heaven, where anybody was welcome to come and go. So this is the paradox: the disciple needs the guru, but that is his business, one should not feel that one is the guru. If the disciple feels that you are the guru, that's his problem

not yours. Without denying you permission to treat him as the guru or yourself as his disciple, he refused to allow the Gurudom to enter into it. And therefore he was a perpetual disciple even though millions all over the world regarded themselves as his disciples.

This spirit was evident in him right from boyhood. He always remembered anyone from whom he learned anything. As a young boy he learned fencing with a stick - only for a few days, I believe, because his teacher happened to be an Untouchable. But a guru is a guru, one who taught me something. When it was time to go, Gurudev went to him, prostrated to him, offered him flowers, worshipped him. Somebody had objected to this Brahmin boy learning fencing from an Untouchable but then in response the young Brahmin boy goes to him, worships him, falls at his feet.

In 1923 or 1924, when he was initiated, he had only a brief contact with the swami who gave him sanyas. This I have heard from Gurudev's lips. "Even though I spent only a few hours in the company of my guru, I remember him every morning." That swami merely gave him the mantra, he didn't perform any ceremony! Everyone from whom he learnt anything he remembered every day. Even when he was worshipped by millions and regarded by millions all over the world as their guru, he himself felt he was a disciple and he devoutly remembered all his teachers and regarded himself as a disciple of all these great masters - that was his greatness, his glory! He could learn from anybody because of the spirit of discipleship, because of the absence of the feeling "I am a guru!"

Another interesting feature: we were half his age, almost nobodies on the spiritual path, we were his disciples. He was the master; he was our father, our mother; he fed us, sheltered us and guided us; he was our guru, our God; and yet if he had some work to do, if he wanted to tell us something, he would not send for us. He hated the very idea of treating you as someone inferior. He had to go to you. Only in the last few years the body couldn't take it, and there was no alternative.

Even when something unpleasant had to be told to you, he would try not to do it directly. He would get hold of somebody else or invent a little story, something indirect, hoping that you might catch it. That was the beauty. Only if we appreciate this, will we also appreciate why Gurudev went to all that expense of issuing so many publications and even why he got so many biographies published. His teaching was his example. Therefore this example had to be brought to the attention of the disciples. How do you do that? Gurudev sets an example, so it has to be brought home to you that this is the example. One can say, "Look at me, look what I am doing." That's boasting and Gurudom again. And so he allowed others who saw the truth concerning these actions of his to write about them and he encouraged those things to be published. It was beautiful. A simple trick. The example had to be pointed out to the seekers, without the Gurudom entering again. That was the method by which Gurudev avoided the extremes of the Guru-disciple relationship.

III

The fundamental principle of sadhana or spiritual life is renunciation. We recite this mantra quite often: "Only by renunciation does man realise immortality." But what is renunciation? What should be renounced or what should not be renounced? What is the spirit of renunciation - not merely the external form of behaviour, but the spirit of renunciation? If we do not understand the spirit of renunciation we are battling with the forms, imagining we are holy men. The holy man must be wholly man, not just a holy man with many holes. There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought. What does the mantra say? Literally translated it means, "Not by any type of action, not by leading a householder's life, not by earning or distributing wealth, but by renunciation alone".

We are fond of jumping to conclusions: ah, not by these

means. They must be renounced, so all actions must be renounced. No relationships, no progeny - so relationships must be renounced. No money, so wealth must be renounced. This is one view.

When you use such illogical logic you are jumping to conclusions, you have come to a conclusion. That means you are not alive any more! The scripture says that you cannot attain enlightenment or realize immortality by inner action, but where does it say that action should be renounced? The scripture does say that no relationship is going to help you, but where does it say that you must renounce them? The scripture says that this realisation is not attained by means of wealth, but where does it say that you should not touch money?

In the early fifties a certain Maharashtra saint visited the ashram in Rishikesh along with his group. Gurudev was there and he asked him to conduct bhajan. He had a powerful voice and was a brilliant man and the author of a number of compositions - and he sang mostly his own compositions. He wore white clothes, and still he was called a swami. Please remember the hall was literally filled with orange robes, and there he was sitting on the platform banging away at his musical instrument. One of his bhajans was a satirical song at the expense of all these swamis. I remember the words very well. "These swamis, you go to them and ask them, 'Why don't you do some work?' 'I have offered my body,' they reply, 'Everything has been burnt to ashes. I am Buddha, a dead body, and a dead body does not function. I have offered myself in the fire of sanyasa so I'm dead, I cannot participate in any activity.'" I remember the last sentence very well. "When you ask him to work he says he's Buddha - but when this dead body becomes hungry, my God, he can eat the world!" So that is renunciation of activity!

But is renunciation of activity of action itself? Krishna says: *Nā hi kaścit kṣamaṁ api jātu tiṣṭhaty ācramāṇāt* "You fool, what are you going to renounce? You cannot remain here for one moment without engaging yourself in some action." Sitting, lying down are actions, blinking is an action. Once

we understand the spirit of renunciation as declared in the Bhagavad Gita we see that Gurudev was a manifestation of that spirit of renunciation.

The other point of view is expressed by many of these social service swamis who say we don't have to renounce anything - we must go on working. There are others who say that sanyasa itself is not meant for this age - one should not take sanyasa at all: renunciation was meant only for satya yuga.

Gurudev was exactly in the middle; just as in every other respect he lived the philosophy of neither - nor: it is neither this nor that, "neti neti". One should not say that everything must be renounced but neither should one say that renunciation is unnecessary. Renunciation is necessary, but one should know what is to be renounced and what it is useless to renounce. Krishna specifically declared: "These three ought not to be renounced: self-sacrificing service, charity and austerity (or simple life)."

Even these should be practised without attachment and veiled rewards. When will I practise self-sacrificing service, charity, austerity or a simple life, without attachment or an 'I' (eye) to its reward? Only when it becomes absolutely and totally natural - when it does not involve the ego. When you are breathing you are not even conscious - you have no motivation for breathing or not breathing. Can you become as natural as this? Can charity become that, can an austere simple life become totally natural - not unconscious, but not motivated?

So what is to be renounced? The motivations are to be renounced, the attachment is to be renounced, craving for result is to be renounced. Can this be done? It does involve a certain action. Yagna is a certain type of action, Dana is a certain type of action. Charity is a certain type of action, as is tapas. But even these must be lived without motivation. Once again, defining sanyasa, Sri Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita, that the renunciate is one who does not reject nor desire.

Once at the suggestion of one of our senior gurubhais, there were some swamis here who used to recommend all sorts of disciplines to new aspirants such as giving up salt or sweets, or tea or coffee for a month. This is alright to develop will power and all that. As suggested by this swami, I thought I would go without sweets for a month. And I was standing outside the present post office which was the office at that time. Gurudev came along, he had some sweets in his hand, and offered me one. I had also been told that Gurudev would test you, and so, not to fall, naturally I said, "No, Swamiji, I'm not eating sweets now." He looked sternly at me, his eyes were smilingly stern. "Take it." He says take it - so take it! As I was trying to put it into my mouth, he said, "Do not ask - do not reject. Then you will know what sanyasa means."

This spirit of sanyas must become natural to us. I don't know whether it can be cultivated, we shall see as we go on. And yet sanyasa or renunciation is necessary. Without renunciation the realization of the infinite cannot be had. Which means that as long as you cling to the finite the infinite is unrealized. It is not that the finite compels you to cling to it, but that you are clinging to the finite. Here is the bondage, here are the chains, and unless I abandon the finite, the infinite cannot become truly real.

Is it then a matter of renouncing ~~x~~ and y being the infinite? No! If you step to y, you have travelled from x finite to y finite, both having the same limitation. This does not mean that therefore I should not give up the x.

I'll give you a very simple example. You want to go up that mountain. What do you do? You first go to the Ganges bank. As you go down you watch how your feet behave. This is exactly what they do. You leave one step and go to the next step, the next step is not your goal. You do not want to stay in that next step, but without it you cannot proceed further. And when you go down to the Ganges bank, unless you leave this shore you cannot go to the other shore. The boat tied to this shore has also to be released. Perhaps this is the significance of the famous sanyasa ceremony. You leave

your home and shave your head, throw out the other clothes and put on orange clothes. It's just getting into the boat; but the boat is not your destination. It takes you somewhere, then you jump out of it, otherwise you will be drowned. Still your destination is not reached. You go there, step after step, you keep on leaving each step behind. That is renunciation. It is not one event in a man's life, it is an ongoing spirit. One cannot say that on the 12th of September I renounced - what? I didn't renounce "I" because I am here to say that. I renounced one form of life and jumped into another form of life. I gave up this shore and got into the boat - but the boat is not my destination. It is an ongoing endless affair.

Kadeshi varaikkum ushara irukkanam. "To the end be vigilant." This was Gurudev's favourite expression. I have heard him say it a thousand times. To what end he did not say. To the end of all this finitude, be vigilant and let that vigilance sustain this threefold activity: charity, self-sacrifice and simplicity, and keep this spirit of renunciation alive.

There is one other intricate, subtle and therefore complex principle - and yet it is so simple. Coming back to our journey: if, while you are going down, seeing that you have to get to that step ten steps below, and before lifting your foot off the step on which you are standing, you reach out, then you are finished. Everything must happen at the proper time. That is why I insist that this spirit of renunciation must become natural. What is renounced must drop away without your knowledge, without your ego participation. Without the use of will, it just drops away. Because when these three, yagna, dana, tapas have become natural, spontaneous, then every form of renunciation happens at the appropriate time.. It does not hurt. It becomes a joyous event.

I have seen Gurudev in the most trying circumstances, when he had to do things he would not have liked two or three years before, but then the face was blooming with joy. He might even tell you, "I didn't want this, now it has happened," not with a sour face, with no regrets. This has to happen now. I took this step and then the next, and the next one is this.

So these steps of renunciation have to happen at the appropriate time. One cannot renounce anything prematurely, then there is danger! I suppose you also realize that in order to renounce you must have it. A beggar does not renounce a kingdom, he doesn't own even a house.

We will go back to Gurudev's life. The first thing to renounce is *tamas*, laziness. And therefore in his own life and the life of those who sought his refuge he tried by every means in his power to knock out laziness. Do something. That was his gospel. Express yourself, only then will you get a clear look at yourself. You sit and close your eyes and look at the tip of your nose. It's easy after a few days practice. "I've no desires at all. I've no ambitions at all. I'm *Brahma*..." That's easy. There are hundreds of vultures hidden in you! Let one of them come out. Just see what happens! You know how to sing, come on, sing; you know how to type, come on, type; you know how to write some nice articles, come on, do that. "I was very *sattvic* and had no desires, no ambitions, no ego, Oh, I was so calm and peaceful!" But put this man to work in something, immediately all those things come up. Jealousy, hatred, ambition, desire, disappointment, greed.

Even in his childhood, we are told by those who knew him, he was a very active boy. Wherever there was action, there he was. He was also a fighter. He used to fight, and if somebody in the household took him to task it seems he would walk out in a huff. He was very sensitive. When later he gave us the formula, "Bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest *sadhana*" -- that was also cultivated. He was a very sensitive person. He lost his mother very early in his life and his elder brothers and sister used to look after him. I met the woman in Mysore. She told me how when he quarrelled with somebody and was taken to task or scolded, he would disappear from the house, go away for a day. A little boy, where could he go? He couldn't renounce the world and become a *swami*! After awhile he would quietly come and stand under a tree. Somebody would notice him and say, "Come on -- come inside."

He was sensitive and he was a hard worker, a hard fighter

right from childhood, very mischievous. But there was one golden quality in that little boy - the quality of charity. Simplicity was also inborn. You can see immediately that if you don't lead a simple life you can do very little charity. If simple living is not natural to you, you may have ten shirts, but if someone gives you another, you will keep it saying, "This may be useful!" But if simple living is natural, then even the third or fourth you will tend to give away. So charity and simple living go together. This was his nature, he was devoted to simple living, although the definition of simple living changed. Self-sacrifice was his nature. He would do anything for anybody in distress or trouble, even as a young boy. Many of the fights and quarrels he got into were also due to defending weak people. Please remember that I'm not describing a young saint, but a young boy.

He had very fastidious tastes in food, and this lasted quite a long time, though he could adapt himself to very simple food. Whatever little he took had to be nicely prepared. Gurudev's sister said that if one day the dahl was not prepared to his liking he would throw it away, get up and walk away. He loved ghee, and the ghee had to be fine, pure and a certain quantity, if that was not there he would get cross. Later we discovered that ghee is very good for the voice and the throat. He probably knew then and there that his kirtan would thrill the hearts of millions of people.

So here were these two qualities - on the one side, intense, dynamic action, on the other side, its corollary, sensitiveness, aggressiveness. This may not be new to you. Gurudev was very aggressive and dynamic and very powerful. He was not a weakling at all. Weakness he did not approve of, weakness is *tamas*, and unless you get over that *tamas* you will never get anywhere. You cannot reach the other shore unless you are prepared to abandon this side. This side is *tamas*. Get onto the flowing river, it is *rajas*. Even if you commit mistakes, be active. If you're ambitious, all right, be active, and express your action, your talents, and you will see the ambition standing in front of you. Then you will say, "My God, all this was in me, all this craving, all this ambition, all this desire, all this attachment was in me."

It is thanks to this dynamic service I am able to see it in front of me." Later while he was undergoing training as a doctor he started a journal called Ambrosia. On the cover is an extraordinary illustration: a muscular man flexing his muscles on one side and holding Ambrosia, the journal, on the other. The message seems to be, "Read this magazine and you will become like this." Everybody must become like that. Strong, muscular, hefty, dynamic. There again, he was intensely dynamic and at the same time charitable. All that knowledge was distributed. There was nothing kept for himself. It was self-sacrificing service, simplicity itself. He used to write the articles for the journal, get it printed and distribute it, ask for advertisements, collect subscriptions (three rupees per year).

You can see there a combination of many factors, some saintly and some perhaps not so saintly. But we are talking about Swami Sivananda when he was still a young man. There was self-sacrifice, there was charity, there was the desire for disseminating knowledge, at the same time there was ambition, happiness at some little factor. Tamas had been left behind, now a rajasic life was being led.

Then he was not satisfied with what scene there was in India and he went over to Malaya.. Gurudev himself said that Malaya was full of mosquitoes, malaria, money and prostitutes. It is our good fortune that Gurudev was not bitten by any of them. His own boss, the doctor for whom he worked, had malaria and had to be carried around. It was a good life for the people who went from here. He was ambitious, and it was there that this rajas took a certain form. He saw immediately that whereas service is good, pleasure may not be so good, it may be misleading. And he also saw what renunciation is. What must be renounced? Anything that stands in your way as an obstacle must be renounced. Why did Swami Sivananda go to Malaya? To serve. In order to serve what do I need and what are the obstacles? I need money, so I get money. I need good health, so he was cautious, he didn't expose himself to malaria and he didn't expose himself to the pleasure-seeking life of Malaya. These are obstacles, renounce them, keep off. And at the same time, these are good

things, service is good, charity is good, the simple life is good, and these he deliberately promoted, for these were also natural to him. The other temptations couldn't even touch him because he was too busy.

You see now, it is not when you fight against the so-called evils that you succeed, but when you are too busy to pay any attention to them. Virtues are not cultivated in themselves, by themselves, but when you are too busy doing something good, you have no time for vice. Because we do not understand this, we knock our heads against stone walls and bleed. When you want somebody to smile, you don't pull his cheeks away, you tickle his foot and the mouth smiles! So the action is here, the result is somewhere else. In order to cultivate good qualities I don't have to go on manipulating them. Tickle somewhere else, that thing becomes good. What must I do in order to overcome some evil habits or evil thoughts? Be active here, then that will disappear, you have no time. That was what he demonstrated in Malaya.

If in this manner life is kept at full tension there is absolutely no possibility of the mind indulging in useless thoughts or harmful emotions. At the same time, this self-sacrificing service, as also charity, continued. What had been renounced? The pleasures of life had been renounced, had been seen to be hollow. Renounced is not the proper word: they had no value at all. It is only because the mind, or something else, sticks the label "Pleasure" on certain experiences that the mind thinks of them. When does the mind not think of them as pleasure? When something else gives you pleasure. When service and charity give you pleasure, when satsang gives you pleasure. These three he had in abundance in Malaya. In that service there definitely was a tremendous ambition. To be the best doctor. It seems that when Swamiji went to the person who was supposed to employ him, a young Englishman, he simply asked Swami Sivananda, "I have a vacancy, but that is for a doctor to be in charge of a hospital. Do you think you can manage a hospital?" Swami Sivananda said, "I can manage not one or two, but five hospitals! Put me in charge." That ambition was definitely there. There was also the spirit of self-sacrifice. So when the accountant

didn't carry out his duties, Swamiji would also do that. If the ward boys were absent, he would sweep the whole hospital. If the nurses were absent, he would do their job also, without grumbling, without making a fuss. Only tamas had been abandoned, the desire for pleasure had not arisen at all. It had no chance to arise, as tamas never had a chance to come up.

His family was not very prosperous. They were ordinary Brahmin landlords in South India, so as a young boy he had probably not had much wealth. And in Malaya there was a tremendous opportunity to earn and handle a lot of wealth. He said, "That I would like, I'm going to have it." So even though he led a simple life, which meant there was plenty to spend in charity, he did not stint himself. He did a lot of charity to himself also! Swami Shraddhananda told us that he used to visit two stores regularly - once a month. One was the book-store, the other was the jewellery shop. Any nice new ring - all his fingers had to have rings. Then he would go for a walk one day on the beach, then next day throw them away. That was renunciation. I've seen what it is to wear rings, now I can discard it. Not without knowing what it is to be wealthy, so he earned a lot of wealth. He enjoyed himself, he enjoyed the feeling of being wealthy. Then he gave all these things away. I don't know if you can appreciate it. Not be merely abstaining - "Oh, no, no, no! I don't want to touch it at all." Then it is possible that at the back of your mind something is bothering you, or much later, when you are old and incapable, you say, "My God, if only I had in those days got a small bank balance or something like that, I wouldn't be suffering now." I never heard this from Swami Sivananda. Yet he was leading a simple life in a different way. He was not indulging himself as the other doctors were indulging. He earned a lot and he spent a lot.

Slowly something else was happening. Some questions. What is life? Because during this period in Malaya he was also directly exposed to spiritual thoughts and ideas. There were many swamis wandering around, and he used to be a permanent host, open house to them all, swamis, beggars and wanderers. Anybody who went from India was always welcomed, lavishly entertained in that house, worshipped in that house. And

he also used to read spiritual literature voraciously. The seeds of the satsang that he used to conduct later were also sown then. What is it that leads a man astray? Mostly bad company. Swamiji had an extraordinary way of manipulating. He would go to the book-store and order all the latest religious books. He didn't choose, I would add that he didn't even read them. He would buy them and keep them in his own personal library. When a friend came along he would say, "Doctor, have you read this? It's very interesting". He had read one page or maybe the publisher's foreword. The doctor would take it home. He comes back a week later. "Ah, did you like the book?" This had two purposes, one, he got the essence of the book without reading it, and two, he cultivated a sort of reputation in his own village that he was a man only interested in religious matters. So if you wanted to have a drink, you didn't go to him. The best way of ensuring that the company that resorts to you is always good company.

All this at the same time must have had some effect on his consciousness. I am serving, and there is a feeling that I am relieving distress, that I am saving life, I am able to prolong life, I am able to relieve distress, promote happiness, health and so on. This was getting shaken as time went by, and another step had to be taken. From this side he got into the boat of action, and soon another step had to be taken.

IV

When we realize that renunciation is spirit and not form, it does not mean that there should not be a form of renunciation. Renunciation, whether it is manifest in external form or unmanifest, is still the spirit. It's important to bear this in mind, because if sanyasa or renunciation is to be confined to people belonging to a monastic order, then moksha is also restricted. Then self-realization or God-realization becomes restricted, the monopoly of a few. The

spirit of sanyasa is available to all. It may in the case of some be accompanied by a formal renunciation, an externally discernable form of renunciation, and in the case of some it may not be so.

The spirit of renunciation is not a matter of effort, it is not the end-product of a series of actions. Effort is invariably associated with "I": "I will not." Renunciation is completely and totally free of this "I will" - "I will not" problem. Does this mean free indulgence? No! That also has to be renounced, because that also is a manifestation of the same ego. "I will do what I like", or "I will renounce", "I will not do what I like", these are identical statements, the distinction is merely alphabetical. There is no vital spiritual difference. "I will" and "I will not" are totally opposed to the spirit of renunciation. When "I will" and "I will not" are both dropped, effort is dropped! And when effort is dropped, everything is not dropped, there is no indulgence. The real spirit of renunciation is when the divine will prevails.

Here is a simple illustration. You may say, "I will take a shower" or "I will not take a shower". But this is the play of the ego. Whether you want to do something or you don't want to do it, or you decide to do something you don't want to do, all this causes problems.

There is another problem. It's raining heavily outside and you have no umbrella or raincoat. You dare not say, "I will not become wet". Somebody else is the controller - that is what I'm talking about. Here is something which is not my choice at all. It is one of choiceless renunciation. Renunciation becomes a choiceless, effortless happening, not because I will it or I will not, but because it is willed.

Is there no effort involved at all in renunciation? There is an effort. Once again Gurudev's fundamental philosophy ought to be borne in mind. It is neither - nor. One extreme is to say: everything depends upon my effort, I will (or I will not) renounce. Another extreme is to say, "Some karma is in charge, I have nothing to do". It's a matter of total passivity, if this is possible at all, which I'm very

doubtful about. Gurudev's was the middle path again here. One has to make one effort, one single perpetual unending effort. That is vigilance. Vigilant watchfulness, this was his word, throughout his life. To be awake, to be alert. This I have to do. This cannot be abandoned. This cannot be renounced. If this is renounced then you are worse than a cabbage (even a cabbage is useful!). This intense watchfulness, to be perpetually awake, never to be spiritually slothful or asleep, that much of effort is called for. Then that itself determines what renunciation is. That watchfulness is able to observe the immediate situation, the immediate problem, and that is removed, not dropped but removed. It disappears even as darkness disappears before light. This is what we saw in Gurudev's life.

So from moment to moment, there appeared to be a change, the renunciation appeared to be perpetual. At times one might even have wondered whether Swamiji was compromising. There is a big difference between compromising and renunciation being perpetually sustained as an ongoing event. In compromise you wish it were otherwise but you are constrained to accept the situation in which you find yourself. There is remorse, there is despair, there is self-pity, self-condemnation, sorrow. This we never found in Shri Gurudev. The spirit of perpetual renunciation which shone as a blazing light within him dispelled darkness wherever it existed, in whatever form it might exist, even if it meant the dispelling of an external semblance or form of a thing called renunciation.

Another beautiful characteristic of Gurudev's was his intense humanness. I have seen, and so have you, thousands and thousands of people who look like human beings. But in him we saw the perfection of what humanness can be. Perhaps that is self-realization, or renunciation, or God-realization - to be exactly what God created you, without the least perversion. It was so beautiful to watch, and one of the most beautiful human qualities is love. What is love? I don't know, perhaps you know. There again this love was born in him as him. Swamiji was a very loving person, not only lovable but also very loving. This was true of his childhood, as

well as of his youth and of his days as a doctor in Malaya. And it was true throughout his life. It is natural that, when this love resides in a young heart, there should be an intensity of friendship. One could see from the description of him provided by his friends, from their attitude towards him and the way he responded to their friendship, that Gurudev was capable of intense personal friendship. Once Gurudev received in his own Kutir a retired postmaster, and the way he patted him, slapped his arms and thighs, carried on with this old man, made us realize that, if this was possible after half a century of separation, then it must have been a tremendous thing when both of them were young. Similarly, when he saw somebody he had known 30, 40 or 50 years before, there was a thrill on his face, not just the impersonal, passive, what we call divine love, but an intense, human friendship, a thing which we do not normally expect in a sanyasin. We noticed the same thing when Gurudev visited Patamadai. There was joy in his face to see the places associated with his childhood. He must have enjoyed life there, including the company of friends. When we also remember that he loved his patients and looked after them with greater love and affection than they received from their own parents, one can easily imagine what intensity of friendship must have characterised his life in Malaya. To snap those ties, just like that, that is renunciation of a very high order.

There was this friendship, possibly bordering on attachment, and this inner light, this vigilance, being alert, being luminous, looked at this friendship, at this attachment, which naturally flowed towards people around him. It was dark a few minutes ago. Now that the electric lights have come, we say the darkness has gone. But did it? No door was opened. Where did the darkness go? All this sounds glorious, wonderful. I am serving sick people, poor people, and deriving some kind of a satisfaction from this - that I am relieving distress, that I am saving people, helping more babies to be brought into this world. In all that there is some ignorance, some foolishness. When the inner light shines upon that ignorance, what happens to it? That is what happened to Swami Sivananda. That is the happening called renunciation. He

just left Malaya and came back to India. Why did he come back to India? The question does not arise at all, he had to go somewhere, and if he did not go you are going to ask why not! There is no question, as there was no motivation. Just then, the situation changed, and renunciation happened.

Why do I labour this point? Because there was no regret at all in his heart, there was no feeling that he was abandoning his friends, deserting his job - no question at all. There was no regret over what might or might not have happened in the past. Whatever dropped, dropped. There was neither a self-satisfaction bordering on pride saying, "Oh, look how much I have renounced", nor was there, "I should not have renounced that, I should not have allowed this to happen." There was no regret at all. It was a continuous march of bliss because the light was there constantly. And, in that light, what had to drop away, dropped away. What had to go, went. (Even these are mere expressions.)

He came back to India and, after some magic vanishing trick in his own home town, he came north. Somehow he got back into the train and found himself in Benares. And though he was a highly educated person, somehow he believed that Benares was in the Himalayas. He came there, the ticket had expired, he had a few rupees left, so he gave them away. "Now that I have reached my destination what do I need money for?" But what he did not appreciate was the difference in climate. It was probably early in March or round that period, so it was cold. Madrasis are not used to this kind of cold. He was shivering, and he could not understand the language. He did not know how to beg. All his ignorance was coming out. So what do you do? He spent a night in one corner of the railway station. Some man noticed him. He had a spare blanket, took it and gave it to Swami Sivananda. That was tremendous renunciation to pick up that blanket and cover himself. What is not difficult to renounce is your bank balance. You don't possess it in any case, it's in the bank! Nor your wife and children, they are all independent beings. The most difficult thing to renounce is pride, the feeling that I have been at the giving end, I have never received anything from anybody. That is renunciation of a very high order.

Something somehow told him that Benares was not what this inner light was looking for. "Where do I go?" Gurudev went to Pandharpur. "I thought this was my destination, and that thought also has to drop away." The first lesson to learn as a sadhu is how to beg. How do you beg? What do you say? You go to somebody's house and stand in front of it. He was in white clothes, not even in orange, so people did not recognize him as a sadhu or a mendicant. And they were Maharashtrians. They would ask this man in Marathi, "What do you want?" He didn't understand Marathi, so what could he do? And after a lot of reflection he decided to stand in front of somebody's house and utter this formula: "I'm a Madrassi Brahmin, I'm hungry, can you give me some food?" Can you do that? In the light that shone within, he had seen the vanity of the other type of life. In that light, what appeared to be ego earlier on melted away. There was no embarrassment. When I say this now I am terribly unhappy even thinking of what happened to him. Yet he was not.

This went on for some time. Probably he was able to enjoy the satsang of the devotees in Pandharpur, but there was another problem, and this throughout Gurudev's life was an extremely serious one. That problem had two aspects. How do I know that the person in front of whose house I am standing can afford to give me this food? In Malaya it seems he used to give food away very often. There were only two people in the house, the cook and himself. When somebody came he would sometimes give his food away and go hungry. How do I know that this person is not going to go hungry too. That was problem number one. Associated with this was the other problem. I am asking for this, receiving diksha from this person. What right have I to do that? What do I give in return? This was another principle that he held fast throughout his life. He used to tell us often, "Do not be a parasite. When you go somewhere, when you receive something from somebody, make sure you can give something in return. If you can do nothing, offer a prayer. Don't be indebted to people." This was his constant refrain. How did that inner light solve that problem? He took a job. It may sound

rather strange that this person who had renounced, who had abandoned being a doctor in Malaya, could suddenly seek another job. The one that was readily available was a job as a postmaster's domestic servant. Can you do that? There it was, the job had to be taken. Soon afterwards the postmaster found out his real identity and asked him, "What are you here for, why must you work as my domestic servant?" And yet Gurudev was not prepared to live as his permanent guest, and so a compromise was arrived at. It was that postmaster who directed Gurudev to Rishikesh. And so he came by train to Rishikesh. He lived for a little while in various places before eventually settling down in Swargashram. "All that had to be given up and here I am in Swargashram." Even as a swami in Swargashram this principle was there. That here again I must not be a parasite, I must not take something for nothing. So what do you do? About the same time, someone who had found out his whereabouts wrote to him from Malaya. "You have an insurance policy here which has now matured. If you sign the following document and send it back to us you will get Rs 5,000." What do you do? Do you say, "No, no, I have renounced the world and all that. I want nothing to do with money." That is the usual reaction. He said, "No, the inner light again determined that, with this, some service could be done for the people amongst whom I live." And so he got his money back. He invested it in the post office savings bank and with the interest, without spending anything on his own comfort, he once again started to serve the sick. That was a talent, that talent had not been renounced. You have that faculty, that experience, that knowledge, that need not be renounced, as long as it does not act as an obstacle. He got that money back, invested it and with the interest got some common medicines, milk and curd and fruits, and distributed it amongst the sadhus and sanyasins without keeping anything for himself. From now on there is another paradoxical situation, money began to flow into his hands. What is the attitude of a man of renunciation, a man in whom the spirit of renunciation is constantly alive and alert? What does he do? Does he shun this? This is as much a crime as that of a person who runs after money. In the consciousness of both these persons, money predominates. There is a common factor, psychological

contact with wealth. There is an expression in the Raja Yoga Sutras as also in the Isavasya Upanishad: "There is this virtue, this article of yama, known as aparigraha." If you repeat these two words within yourself - pari graha, aparigraha - you will realise that these two words have the same root, grh, which is closely related to the English word greed, and also the other English word grasp. How does money create a problem? Only when you grasp it. When you are greedy and you grasp it, then there is grhana. Grhana means eclipse also, the inner light is eclipsed. You are holding only this wealth (graha) and there is this eclipse.(grhana). Why not allow it to flow? In which case there is aparigraha of a dynamic type. That was what we saw in Gurudev. That was his teaching too. Treat your own property as though it has been entrusted to you, you are only a trustee of this property which you mistakenly feel that you own. Don't hold onto it, grab it or grasp it, let it flow through you if it has to be. That was the attitude from Swargashram onwards and therefore when things grew into the ashram, later into the Divine Life Society, into the Forest University, money kept pouring through him like this rain pouring over the roof. When something like this flows, it is of universal benefit. The person who refuses to let this flow, rejects God's blessings, and his ego is as strong, as powerful, as much of an obstruction as the ego of a multi-millionaire who says, "I am rich."

At that time Gurudev said quite plainly, "I don't want disciples, I don't want ashrams, I don't want to have anything to do with any institutions. I merely want to sit here - sing God's name, do bhajan, meditate, serve and that's it." Serve, love, meditate, realize. But then disciples came, people were attracted to him. And people also took him away from Swargashram to preside over sankirtan conferences. The inner light suggested that this was no obstacle. The service part is the very reason for your existence. Therefore he travelled, and thousands of people used to be thrilled, literally thousands of people used to experience the ecstasy of the divine name when he sang and danced. And there was no obstacle there. It was on the contrary the very fruit of his renunciation, the constantly ongoing renunciation. And when he returned, there

were inevitably some people who would follow him. Some came, some visited him, and some decided to stay. Therefore even the idea that I will not allow anybody to become my disciple had to go, it just dropped away in the light of this inner intelligence. All the ideas that one may entertain in the infancy of one's spiritual life may have to be renounced, or may have to be allowed to drop away. This also dropped away.

Then something happened in Swargashram. He liked Swargashram very much, it suited his temperament perfectly but then there was a problem. The Swargashram authorities' rules would not permit too many disciples for any one Mahatma living there, and even that residence in Swargashram, which he really loved, had to be allowed to drop when he went over to Ramashram. Even that had to go. The thing that he valued most for its spiritual quality had to go. For a long time he resisted forming a society and even that resistance had to go. Then he did not want a big ashram, that had to go too. To begin with they occupied a cowshed. (Gurudev wanted to do some stable work!) So they cleaned it and occupied it, and that again was an act of supreme renunciation. I am occupying this building without knowing to whom it belongs. If someone comes and says, "This house belongs to me, you must get out," we would immediately leave. I don't want this at all. I don't want an ashram. I am not fond of disciples but, if this is the divine will, it shall be done without any resistance. Then the Maharaja of Tehri gave him a piece of land. If it is the divine will that an ashram shall spring up, it shall happen. I do not want it, it may happen. But there was no resistance.

When it came to the ashram, there were some principles, which he himself had set for his own work. For instance, in the beginning ladies were not allowed to come and stay alone. No musical instrument was allowed during satsang. We would all sit and sing kirtan as if we were meditating. Then came electricity. Then came Raghava. "Ah, you can sing, all right, sing". "Swami, I need a harmonium in order to sing well." "All right, we will buy a harmonium." Somebody else came, "I know how to dance!" "Dance!" Here was this man of supreme renunciation, who participated in the Divine will. He did not endure it,

but participated in it, made it possible! Then came a family who stayed for a couple of years - welcome! Then some ladies from Dehra Dun came. "You want to stay for a few days? Stay!" In the words of Jesus Christ, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. If this is the divine will, I will myself co-operate with it and make it possible. Because there is no personal 'I' here at all. The word 'I' is nothing but the first letter of the word Idea. When the 'I' drops, all your own ideas drop away. You become perfectly transparent, an absolutely free channel for the flow of the divine will. This is what the spirit of renunciation ensures from day to day - from moment to moment!

V

Sadhana has a very simple definition, if we can be content with a universal meaning of practical application. It means "means", the means with which you put forth effort to attain. From Shri Gurudev we learned one simple lesson. Everything, your body, your environment, your life, your physical and psychological equipment, the world outside and the world inside, all of these constitute the means. The end is perfection. This may not be clear, but the moment you look at his life, his behaviour, his teachings, his words, then it becomes clear.

In the mid-fifties a young man came and joined the ashram. He was called Kandaswamy a very talented young man. Gurudev encouraged everyone to develop his or her own talents, and somehow managed everything in such a way that your talents were used not only for your own self-improvement or self-realization, but for the common good. Kandha had an interesting battery of talents. He was not shy at all. He had no use for modesty, humility, that sort of thing. He was a forthright person. So Gurudev noted that against his name. This is a quality - good quality, bad quality was not his concern. This is a quality which can be made use of. Bring it out.

At the same time a Hari Katha performer had come to the ashram. Hari Katha is telling a story interspersed with music and some kirtans. These pundits could entertain you for a long time, it was a very interesting art form. And Kanda had an idea. He said, "Why don't we frame another Hari Katha based on the life of Gurudev?" He was definitely the right man for it. And so this plan was hatched. We agreed to bring in Gurudev's own English songs.

Kandha wanted information about Gurudev's life. Gurudev used to come to my room for about half an hour or so every morning to do some work. And at that time this man also came. "Swamiji, we want to make a Hari Katha of your life story." "Ah, yes, yes -- it's a good idea!" "But I need some information, Swami." "Ask Venkatesananda Swami, he has all the biographical material." From then on we started working on the life story, putting in some songs and so on. I told him all I knew about Gurudev's early life and his life in Malaya. Then came the life in Swargashram, and I told him Gurudev used to practise all sorts of intense austerities, and intense meditation sometimes for 2 or 3 days. He attained self-realization and then began to tour. He got me there. "But what sadhana exactly did he do? And what do you mean by meditation? What do you mean by self-realization?" I also wanted to know! Naturally I was curious, but I dared not ask Gurudev himself. Here was a man who had no inhibitions at all, he would blurt out anything in front of anybody. I told him, "Swamiji is coming in a few minutes, why don't you ask him?"

Swami Sivananda came in at about 8:30. As soon as he sat down he looked at us questioningly. I looked at my associate and he shot. "I have reached the Swargashram period but afterwards I don't have enough information." "What do you want to know?" "What is meditation? What sadhana did you do? What austerities did you practise? What and how did you meditate? What is meant by self-realization?" "Ask Venkatesanandaji, he will tell you everything!" "He does not know anything, you must tell me yourself."

I was petrified, absolutely silent. I was not even breathing. Gurudev reacted in an extraordinary way. He

closed one eye, looked at me, looked at him, looked at me, looked at him. I was silent, innocent, because I also wanted to hear. We really knew very little about Gurudev's sadhana. We had been repeating what somebody else had said or heard from some other source. Now I would hear the truth from the Lion's mouth.

"What do you mean by self-realization?" "Peace. Bliss." But this man was still not satisfied, and he could argue with anybody, Gurudev included. "Peace and bliss! Then Venkatesanandaji is also enlightened - he is always peaceful, always smiling!" Now something had been opened up. "Ah, that's only one part of it - enlightenment is not a joke. Atma jnana is not a joke. Ah, you must be serious!" Then this man also became silent. This was about 8:45. From this time to 12 o'clock Gurudev went on saying you must do this, you must do that... And at the same time, it was our good fortune, he also gave some instances of what had happened in his own life. "Atma jnana means you have direct intuitive knowledge of the cosmic being, direct intuitive understanding of cosmic oneness, cosmic power. Hah, it's not a joke. Your ego must completely disappear in all its facets, in all its games it must be defeated. Can you do that?" And then he gave us, just the two of us, a three-hour lecture - it was most thrilling, most inspiring. It can never be forgotten.

In the meantime people were getting worried in the office. Swamiji had not come. They knew he had left his Kutir and he was in this room. So first somebody came to spy, he heard Swamiji shouting. And he went and told those people up there, "Oh, Swami Venkatesananda is in trouble." Then one or two others came and found out he was talking. Soon there were also a few people on the steps, sitting and listening. Inside the house was full, outside an audience had formed.

What he told us that morning in essence was what is called Integral Yoga. The first principle of that Integral Yoga is that you do not become a specialist, however capable you may be. Gurudev's approach was a very beautiful simple one. "Eat a little, drink a little, do asana a little, pranayama a little, reflect a little, meditate a little." If I can

meditate for 16 hours, what's wrong with that, is meditation not good? He says, "I insist, meditate only a little." Otherwise you become a specialist, and any form of specialisation is an excellent tonic for the ego! If you are an expert in Hatha Yoga you have one horn growing up here. This "I know better than anybody else" is a danger. And what is worse, the same ego can take innumerable forms. If you have played with a half-inflated balloon you will know what I mean. You squeeze it at one end and all the air bulges at the other end. Squeeze it in the middle and it bulges at both ends. That is the ego, squeeze here, it gets inflated somewhere else. The quantity of air being constant in this balloon, nothing has even happened. Squeezing is a waste of time. So any lopsided development is a waste of time, you will gain nothing out of it. Instead, you have to get hold of that half-inflated balloon and lie down on it. Then it bursts. When there is equal pressure throughout this balloon at the same time, then you have achieved your purpose. If that is possible, then that is what is called Integral Yoga. That is the famous "little, little" song. Do pranayama a little, not too much. Do asana a little, not too much. Do kirtan a little, not too much. Study a little, not too much. So that you will have time for every aspect of your sadhana. And then serve a little, in that you see the world and your own role in it in a different light. Nothing is neglected.

I don't know if you have heard a little story from the Mahabharata called Nala Charitra. There was a great king called Nala. It is said he was a very pure man, very, very holy. And there was no defect, no sin in his personality. And he was supposed to be afflicted by Sani. Sani could not enter him as long as his personality was whole, holy. It is said that Sani was dogging his footsteps constantly, watching for an opportunity to enter. One day, after this Nala had taken his meal, he washed his face, his hands, his feet, but not quite properly. On heel was left unwashed. And at once Chani entered him, a pin-point approach. This story can be interpreted to mean that if you leave one little pinpoint open in your personality, the ego will re-enter it. You can congratulate yourself: "I practise yoga asanas, I practise pranayama,

I sit and sing, attend satsang," but still if something is missing, one aspect of your personality has been neglected, and as long as that is neglected there is no salvation, there is no self-realization, because the ego is cosily at rest there, thriving there. That was Gurudev's most beautiful and unique approach! I have never heard of other holy men of India who have insisted upon this. Nothing is to be neglected, everything is to be converted, turned into sadhana, the means. If you know how to do something, treat it as sadhana. If you have work to do, perfect, use that opportunity! That was the ideal which Shri Gurudev built into this ashram.

One other incident I will narrate to you. I won't give you the unpleasant part of the story. This happened in October or November 1945. I was living in Ramashram. You can't even imagine the conditions in those days. We had hardly any accomodation for ourselves. When some visitor came we were summarily dismissed from any room we might be occupying, bundled our things and came to the Bhajan hall. In the office there was a little table on which we kept a typewriter. At night we would spread a blanket over our own papers, and sleep there.

Well, one day I saw something not very pleasing in the ashram. Of course, I had an image of what the ashram should be like and what the swamis should be like. My ideas got a little bit of a shake up, so I went back to my room, and just sat there. This was the first, the most superwonderful miracle I experienced in our relationship. Half an hour later Gurudev walked in. In those days I never talked to him except through a medium, a swami who also came with me. He used to get work for me from the office and when I had finished the work, I would give it to him. I never spoke to any other swamis here. Suddenly here was Gurudev himself, there was a charpai, a woven bamboo bed. He had his usual bags in his hand. He threw them on the charpai and sat down. I didn't know why he had come or what for. I just stood in front of him. What he said was fantastic. Even now I can see him sitting there looking straight into my eyes with one eye closed. Later when he closed one eye and talked to us it was very beautiful. That day, I remember, it was shocking. It was a

new experience for me talking to him that close.

There is a river near Rishikesh called Chandra Bhaga. It has swallowed quite a few people. So Gurudev said, "Don't think that, because you have come beyond Chandra Bhaga, you have come to the Kingdom of God, that all that is Maya and all this is Brahman." I dared not say a word, I just listened. "Hmmm, even if you go to the top of Mt. Kailas, you will find Maya there!" Something was coming clear, but still I was quiet. "I have created a field here. If you want, you can bathe in the Ganges, sit and meditate on the Ganges bank, do some work in the office, go to the Bhajan hall and sing Hare Rama for one hour or two, do puja in the temple, read some books, do Swadhyaya, go to the jungle, meditate if you want. Even here you may find the same Maya and the same Brahman, right up to Kailas! But if you have the aspiration you can convert the whole thing into a field of sadhana. Everything that happens to you in life can be turned into a sadhana, a means for God-realisation."

These were his words. And then, "Hmmm, aha!" he picked up his bag and went away, disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared! That is the very essence and the heart of his message. If you want, not only this ashram but the whole universe can become a field for sadhana. Everything you do can be utilized for performing your sadhana, where your life itself becomes a part of your sadhana. The sadhana being a total transformation of your being, the purification of your entire personality, and the total dedication of all your talents and faculties to the divine. Here it was to the guru, which means the same thing. If you live in an ashram, all the talents and faculties in you are dedicated to the guru, all your energy is directed towards guru seva. And even if you do not live in an ashram the same thing can apply, the entire personality can be transmuted. All your talents and faculties can be offered in the service of God who is omnipresent.

VI

Gurudev's yoga was Integral Yoga, represented by the four words "serve, love, meditate, realize". Integral Yoga suggests not a step by step progression, but an expansion of integrated consciousness. There is a slight difference. Take for instance the famous word ashtanga in Raja Yoga. It is not one step following another, but more like the birth and growth of a baby. On the very first day the baby has all the limbs of the future grown-up. But they are small, undeveloped. As this person grows up, his limbs attain their fullness of perfection. Similarly, in this Integral Yoga, all the limbs of the Integral Yoga are found in the very beginning of the sadhak's career. If that is not there then you are deluding yourself again. You may feel, I am progressing in karma yoga, but then something else is lacking! Your jnana is lacking or your devotion is lacking. Then as you go on you find your karma yoga is no better than social service. Gurudev never tolerated that.

Gurudev was dynamic in comparison to the other "holy men" we found in Rishikesh. Some of us went round and saw Swamis sitting under a tree gazing at the sky, or on the Ganges bank, meditating or reading or gossiping. Here was one who was dynamic, constantly engaged in some form of activity, and we young men inferred from this that Gurudev liked activity. When we started doing some work, we could see from Gurudev's behaviour that he was very happy, the only thing that Gurudev would not really tolerate was tamas. You are active, he was thrilled; but not entirely. About 15 minutes after we walked into the ashram - two of us came together - we were both provided with typewriters. Half an hour later came paper, and another half an hour later some books or manuscripts for us to copy. So the first impression that we gained was that Gurudev liked work and workers. This was true, but not entirely. So we went on working, doing more and more and more - sometimes the best part of the night was spent in work. It was pleasing to Gurudev, no doubt about that. But then one day, very early in 1946, he walked past the room in the old kitchen which was part of our office. He looked in. "How many malas of japa

did you do today? Did you meditate at all? No? Take the typewriter and throw it into the Ganges! Go and do some japa."

So this Swami likes japa more than typewriters? It's not that! It's nothing more than anything else. So you start rolling beads. "Aha, what is this - sitting in the corner rolling beads?" You go this side, there is a kick, go that side, there is a kick!

And in the same context I'll bring in one other story of our life in the initial stages of the ashram. In those days there were no steps, no ghat, nothing like that on the Ganges banks. There was an enormous rock, with a platform built over it. And there was a young man from Andhra who used to sit very straight, a human rock over a mountain rock. We had a morning meditation session which also included some asanas, some pranayama, some japa and all that. The class used to conclude usually at about six. Everyday Gurudev used to see this young man sitting on the rock, and every day he used to see him sitting there when he went back to his kutir. And occasionally he would just glance at him and walk by. One day it so happened that after the morning class, Gurudev was still sitting on one of those cement benches, discussing something with somebody. This gentleman who had been meditating got up in the meantime and walked into the kitchen. "Aha", Gurudev closed one eye and looked at him. "Hmm, Hmm. Meditation - Ah, Samadhi. Ahh." He thought that Gurudev was really admiring him! "Yes Swamiji." "How long did you sit?" "Three hours, Swamiji." "Every day." "Three hours every day, Swamiji." "Ahcha." We were all very happy that this man was being encouraged. "Hmm." Suddenly, within one fifteenth of a second the whole thing changed. "Ah - look at this. Sleepy, drowsy. What kind of meditation are you practising?" He didn't know what to do. I cannot describe to you the speed with which the expression on Gurudev's face changed in those five minutes - like a baby. Once he seems to be serious, then he seems to be almost cross, next he seems to be compassionate, next he seems to be full of affection and love, and then he seems to be mocking - mischievous. "What you are doing is useless! Meditation is useless? No! Meditation is not useless, what you are

doing is useless. It is not meditation." Then Swami Sivananda explained, "Do you know what meditation means?" And now the mood changed again. Those of us who were standing there could see. You have heard about meditation, you have read about meditation, you have thought about meditation. But for those few moments, we saw meditation. "Hah - do you know what meditation means? Touch Brahma - touching the infinite, touching the absolute." When he said that, you could see the touching. "And if you touch this absolute infinite power for even one moment, you have the energy, the strength, the wisdom to roll up the whole sky and play ball with the whole earth."

This is important. The other thing is important too, but one is not more important than the other. All of them together have to be done. One goes with the other. It is an integral yoga - ashtanga yoga. The whole thing must be done at the same time, and therefore a little of each - that was his joy. And so even though we may consider these factors one by one, please let us not go away with the impression that they follow in a sequence. We have to print the four words, "serve, love, meditate, realize" one after the other. Is there any way in which these four words can be printed together? You may jumble them, put this before and that after, but the truth is they are integral, together.

That will be immediately clear if we realize that what is called service, or nishkama karma, or what is even more beautifully put in the English language - self-less service, itself involves bhakti yoga and jnana yoga; otherwise it is not possible. Nishkama karma is not selfless service or unselfish service as defined by someone else. How do you know if I am doing it unselfishly or selfishly? You consider it unselfish as long as I don't demand any fees from you. I may not be! I may be looking for something else, I may be more selfish than you think or realize. So what is unselfishness, what is selfless service? This selfless service is not possible without a certain realization. So serve, love, meditate, realize. Service follows and accompanies realization - self-realization. It is only when the self is realized to be non-existent that selfless service is possible.

I don't know if you are interested in playing with words! Aham kara and aham bhavana - very interesting words. Do you know from where the word aham comes? It's quite simple. They picked the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet "a". They picked the last letter of the Sanskrit alphabet "ham". They put them together and one dot on top. So what is aham? Aham is nothing but a word! If you challenge the yogi he says, alright then, show me what this aham is. This is nose, this is right ear, this is lower lip. Aham? It doesn't exist! So he says aham is merely a word. This word as a concept arose or was introduced into our consciousness, which became the mind, the individualised consciousness, at some stage in our life when we were young. That has remained unquestioned, unexamined until today. It has been taken for granted, nobody has bothered to enquire if this aham is a reality. We have taken that for granted and built a whole edifice of avidya (ignorance) around it. When this aham became a bit more intangible, it became aham bhavana. Aham bhavana means it is an inner feeling of aham. It is an inner feeling, I am the body. There is the mischief. This birth of the word and the corresponding concept gain the stature of a feeling. The feeling being aham bhavana or I am the body - the root cause of all our troubles. This has somehow been introduced into us and it has been left unexamined and therefore it has been taken for granted. Then comes ahamkara. When it becomes functional, the same bhavana becomes ahamkara! And so we have more or less got trapped into the idea, the feeling, the concept that aham is ego-sense, that it is somehow real.

Selfless service is possible only if this whole drama comes to an end, if this myth is exploded, if this ghost is laid. Only when a man realizes that the self is not there, it is absent. Not when I think I am selfless, but when I have truly realized that the "I" is non-existent. If I want him to smile, I tickle his foot! Selfless service becomes natural when the self is seen to be non-existent. Therefore selflessness means that in the case of that person the ahamkara does not exist at all! In which case his entire life becomes service. Gurudev used to insist upon this. That service of the poor, the sick, the destitute is important, but you need

not go in search of all this. For whatever service you do can be done with this ahamkara bhavana. There is a most inspiring verse in the Bhagavad Gita. "He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded - worshipping Him with his own action, man attains perfection. (XVIII-46) Krishna here does not even suggest that this karma should be your dharma. Svakarmana - whatever you are doing, whatever you are made to do, right, wrong, virtue, vice, whatever it is, by treating all those actions as flowers offered at the feet of the Omnipresent Being man attains perfection. This was Gurudev's life's attitude.

If you have read some of the biographies, you may have noticed that we have published instances of what has been described as "self-sacrificing service". I'm sure you've heard this expression before. What does sacrifice mean? Literally it means "to make sacred". So here self-sacrifice literally and truly means realizing the sacred self, not your assumed self. You realize that what you have been regarding as your self is in fact not that - but something quite different. Jiva, atma, corresponding words do not exist in any other language. We make these subtle distinctions. In the English language they have a thing called soul. I do not know what the soul is. Here sacrifice means to examine what you have been taking for granted, the self. When you look into it, you realize that it was a shadow. And the substance was something entirely different, atma. An attainment of this atma jnana is self-sacrifice. So service that is made possible by the attainment of atma jnana is self-sacrificing service.

In the case of Gurudev the self-sacrificing service took the initial form of braving danger. What was our original difficulty? It was the overcoming of this notion that "I am the body". In order to overcome this "I am body" feeling you engage yourself in tapas or austerities, or in self-sacrificing service which involves braving danger. Since Gurudev had been trained as a doctor, the service naturally took the form of service of the sick. "I am the body" is a wrong notion, a dangerous concept but the talent to serve the sick which is in consciousness, there is no danger in that. Why doesn't the

"I" allow this faculty to function? That's the idea. When he came to Swargashram, he was the one who was constantly on demand whenever there was a serious case of illness. And if you and I were afraid to go near a small-pox patient, it was always Swami Sivananda who went. Gurudev did not even take any antiseptic precautions. He used to attend to some people, rub his hands on his head and walk off. Wash your hands? What are you going to wash off? And he walked away. He had that realization "I am not the body", that's it. So the body can be put to any form of service, without fear, without anxiety. The body itself is endowed with what you call karma and it knows when to come to an end, when to stop breathing - you won't have to tell it. If right now you do pranayama and hold your breath for more than one or one and a half minutes, you gasp. You are suffering. One of these days you won't breathe for a long time. And you won't feel any discomfort. That is what prarabdha means. Prarabdha means the body has started to live, breathing has commenced, hunger has commenced, thirst has commenced, sleep has commenced, when you are conceived, when you are born; and that will take its own course. When all these things will come to an end only they know, you and I don't know! This is what prarabdha means. Life has started. So "I am the body" is the wrong idea, and when that goes the yogi is able to brave danger.

There are a number of stories of how Gurudev served the dangerously sick, with great love and affection. This is part of bhakti yoga. You might want to chop these up into several compartments, this is karma yoga, and love is bhakti yoga, and he has realized the oneness and that is jnana yoga, and so on. But all are integrated, it is integral yoga. There is another risk in regarding these as separate compartments and in regarding service of the sick or of the poor as something of tremendous importance. And that is that you are constantly looking for sick or poor people, almost praying that there may be sick people and poor people. This Gurudev never did, he made everybody happy, he made everybody healthy, he made everybody feel healthy, feel happy, he was not looking for sick people. Another danger in this is that any form of specialised service is ostentatious. Any form of specialised

sadhana is ostentatious whether you wish to accept it or not. Specialization is ostentation. That again defeats the very purpose of integral yoga. And therefore when Gurudev did this, no one knew. Later in order that the example might be communicated to others, these incidents were told and allowed to be published. When he did them no one knew. The service has to be as action which has to be done, "kartavya karma", "Kartavya" is one who regards an action as something to be done, without motivation whatsoever. It is he that performs nish-karma yoga or what we prefer to call nirahamkara yoga. And this nirahamkara yoga embraces devotion, seeing God in the other person, and jnana, self-realization - realization that what has been regarded as "I", aham, does not exist, except as a word in the dictionary. The life of such a person is constant meditation and therefore in the case of Gurudev we saw that he was constantly in what the Vedantins call sahaja - to him samadhi, meditation was sahaja avastha. "Sahaja" in the sense natural, easy, spontaneous, continuous. It is when one is in the sahaja that self-sacrificing, selfless service happens. He didn't have to stop looking at somebody and say, "This young man is having some trouble, headache - No, not young man! He is God, God come to me in the form of this young man with a headache and now as an instrument in the hands of God I am going to serve him." Too much time wasted in all this! One of the most extraordinary features in the case of Gurudev was that action came at once. Words came much later if at all. First do what you have to do! There is no thought, there is nothing involved, there is no consideration. The brain was not working here at all, no motivation. Action was spontaneous, action was instantaneous. It was not even considered service. It has to be done and what has to be done springs from utter and total selflessness, from the realization that what has been assumed as the self, as aham, is non-existent. That was the beautiful selflessness that we saw in the Master. That is extraordinary. Only if we realize that will we also realize that once the self is realized to be non-existent, the yogi does not go on torturing the body - what for? In later years in Gurudev we saw these two go side by side, together. He didn't want you to suffer, and he did not want even that body which was called swami Sivananda to suffer.

Only if you clearly understand this, is it possible to see why Gurudev massaged himself with oil, why he had all sorts of tonics and drugs and insulin injections - insulin for the body, not "I". This body is sick, put some insulin into it. This body is capable, push it, make it work. Exactly like a car, exactly like another instrument or vehicle. Not "I". The aham bhavana is not there, this "I am body" idea is gone. Then you are neither interested in perpetuating it by feeling "I am doing this", nor interested in torturing the body because "I am not the body, what are you torturing?" If someone does that it is usually in order to show off. Which means you are still clinging to the "I am body" idea. Only in the case of such perfected beings, siddhas, is it possible to see that the "I am body" idea is completely non-existent and whatever they do, that action springs from them spontaneously, instantly. This body is as important, as valuable as the body we call the bodies of others. There is no distinction. And so what started as self-sacrificing service eventually blossoms into totally divine selfless service.

VII

In an enlightened being it is not the aham bhavana that functions as ahamkara. Actions do not spring from what we have accepted as a solid reality: the ego-sense. In their case actions spring spontaneously from whatever is. 'Is'vara-(Is'a):what is.

"Is'avassyan idam sarvam - what is pervades all". And yet as long as these enlightened sages choose to dwell in the physical body even they have their own guiding principles. Those of you who have read the Srimad Bhagavatam may have come across the great personality called Jada Bharata. He was born illumined, enlightened in the third incarnation. He didn't care for scriptural or worldly duties and responsibilities and so forth, but it is said that when he walked he watched his steps so that even unwittingly he might not step

on any insects and crush them.

Kartavya karma springs from this cosmic consciousness which is in all. Even one in whom there is no ego-sense - there is no ahamkara, there is no ahambhava - even he is cautious. In the words of Sri Gurudev - "Never hurt others' feelings, be kind to all." This was his life-breath.

Now even this kartavya, even that which has to be done, has somehow to be reconciled to this self-discipline. Even that kartavya - what has to be done - has to pass through this test, that it does not hurt anybody. This was evident throughout his life in his dealings with everybody, and it was even more abundantly evident in his dealings with his own disciples. Such a guru has never been born - probably never will be born again.

I mentioned before that he would fold his palms, and bow down to his disciples. In other places one disciple carries the water pot, another carries the kusasana. The third carries the stick and so on. You never heard Gurudev call someone to carry anything for him. In the last few years when he was helpless and just couldn't get up and walk to meet the disciples, when he had to call there was such sweetness, such love. When he was in his own kutir and wanted to call someone, Satchidananda, it was not calling a servant or somebody, it was love. "Venkatesanandaaaah." Great joy, it was lovely to hear that. So the other person did not even think, "Why is he calling me?" Even if I am an egotistical person, I must be pleased, I must feel a thrill of joy to hear calling me.

All the disciples were there to be trained, to be moulded. I don't know if you have ever seen stone images being chiseled. How do you mould something without hitting it? It is impossible. You can't even prepare chapati without hitting it. Believe it or not he fashioned these chapaties without hitting, without in the least offending. It was fantastic. And it was this seva that Gurudev rendered that has now spread out to the whole of mankind. How he trained the disciples, why he did so, is a thrilling story. It is the greatest service that a sage, an enlightened being can render mankind. Somebody is sick, and a doctor or even a swami gives you some medicine and the

sickness is finished. After some time you are also finished. Maybe some of us go to the swami hungry and he gives us some food. The next morning we are hungry again. That's finished. Maybe we go to the swami as idiots - he blesses us, gives us a mantra, teaches us how to meditate, and somehow you become a good man. An intelligent wise man, you have helped. It was in so training those who resorted to his feet that they in their turn became channels of communication for him. When we contemplate that service we really wonder how it happened at all.

He himself used to say, "You don't have to go around the world, come and stay in the ashram, the ashram is a miniature world." There were as many temperaments in the ashram as there were people. And Gurudev being cosmic, he never imposed the same discipline on all. I still remember one story: There was a young swami. He didn't believe in puja and all that. Gurudev used to come all the way from his kutir to the temple, three times each day. There was another swami who used to prepare kicheri very nicely. In those days there was nothing for us to eat in the morning, and a cup of tea was the only thing we could get. Gurudev used to come and while the prasad was being distributed, he would be particular that some would go to the swami who did not attend at the temple. And today I believe the same swami is a great devotee, and offers continuous worship day and night.

If you were a hatha yogi, he wouldn't encourage you to practise more hatha yoga, but he would introduce you to everybody, "Oh he is a fantastic hatha yogi, he has a body of rubber." If someone liked to study, he would tell him: "Go and get jnana, go and study." "I have heard it with my own ears. "Stay in your room, study and do japa, everybody must attend to you - see that he gets his tea and food. Whatever he wants should be supplied. He should not be disturbed." If you had a disciple, would you do that? You expect your disciple to serve you - that's why you make disciples. But here is a master who says, "This person is something special, he has his own ways, nobody should disturb him, even I won't disturb him." Everybody should serve him. Serve him, that is equal to serving me." That is something difficult to understand.

Without disturbing anybody, never hurting others' feelings - that was his maha mantra. Now all of us came here when we were very young, and naturally these raw young men had to be trained in some way or another. How did he do that? How do you make a chapati round without rolling it, without heating it? How do you sculpt a model from stone without chiseling it? It's possible if you keep rubbing it with your bare hands, in about 500 years you can make a small head. That's what he did.

One day, shall we say two of us might quarrel. We are both young and hot-blooded, he says something and I say something. Somebody goes and reports this to Gurudev. If he felt that it was not a very serious thing, he wouldn't come and tell you. "Oh no, I might offend him. Maybe he is in the right." Instead Gurudev might write an article: "Anger your worst enemy" or "Never hurt others' feelings - be kind to all" or "The tongue is such a terrible weapon." If the quarrelsome swami in question was a typist, he would give him three copies to type. It is very difficult to type without reading what you are typing, so perhaps you wonder, maybe it is for me? Even if you don't wonder, some seed drops into your heart; that this thing must go. Even afterwards when you gave it back to him, would he say, "Did you understand it?" - No nothing at all. What you did was immaterial. And if he was not a typist, the article would be typed by someone else and he would be asked to read it in the satsang at night. In the satsang he becomes the guru, reading this article aloud, and maybe a few people laugh, a few people smile. Somehow the message must go home. If it does not, and he continues to be the bully, what would you do? Call him and give him a piece of your mind? That was very rare. The next trick was to shower him with milk and fruits. Somebody complained about you, that he is a very rude man, he is abusing everybody. As soon as the complaint reached Gurudev, half an hour later someone comes running with two bananas. Fifteen minutes later Govind Swamiji sends some Upma, half an hour later somebody brings coffee. "Swamiji sends this." And then when Gurudev meets him later, "Ah, how is your health, are you alright? Have you had some Chyavanaprash, can I send you some Brahmi

oil?" And the man who complained about his bad behaviour stands there thinking, "My God, what is this, I said he is rude, instead of ticking him off, this swami seems to pamper him more and more." But all the time this young man's heart is being won.

If there is a mosquito, I can hit my arm - this arm does not say, "Why are you hitting me?" I am hitting my own arm. In the same way till you become part of him the medicine was not administered. So the main thing was to notice you, make you completely one with him, with your heart, completely one with him in love and affection. Then, once you were completely in his hands, he would wring the juice out of you to serve everybody in the world. But it was a delight to be squeezed, you just wanted that he might do some more. Whether he was scolding you or making you work hard, whatever it was, you knew it was lovely. My God, why doesn't he do some more. Then you have become part of him. Even then there is this supreme, inexhaustible love, only through that love he tried to teach, he tried to mould and he tried, if it was needed, to correct.

Even then if it was something serious and some serious admonition had to be delivered, first of all, he would never listen to others' complaints, he had to see some symptoms of it for himself. And even if he had sufficient proof and he had to tell you, he put it off again and again. "Ah, we will see to-morrow." He would look at you and probably want to say something but no, "Poor man, he might be offended, he may be upset, give him some fruits."

I've heard him say this: "I go to my room and think about it." He spends a sleepless night for an insignificant mosquito's sake. The next day he says, "I pray for him." Another day, "God must look after all this." Then finally when it has to be done, then he would come and tell the disciple in as sweet a language as possible. He would even rehearse the whole thing in his kutir. What for? Isn't a disciple capable of taking a bit of scolding from a guru? But that may be your point of view. His point of view was, "Never hurt other's feelings, be kind to all." So there was this constant dual attitude in his case. Kartavyam - yes, what has to be done,

has to be done. But what has to be done should not cause unpleasantness, let alone harm.

How could Gurudev reconcile what superficially appears to be self-contradictory? This action has to be spontaneous. But what are the guidelines for this spontaneous action? And how can action, which naturally involves diversity and devotion which at least involves dualism, be reconciled with realisation of absolute oneness? There is a beautiful verse attributed to Hanuman. It is said that once Rama asked Hanuman, "You have performed wonders in my life and you are still devoted to me. You are a wise person, well versed in the Vedas. What is your attitude towards me? What do you think is our relationship?" It is said that Hanuman replied: Deha bhiḍhyāstu dāśosmi jiva buddhyā tyadamsakah ātma buddhyā tvamevāham iti me niscitā matih. "You asked me what is my relationship to you. Whenever I am body-conscious, whenever there is a feeling, however subtle it may be, however weak it may be, that "I am the body: then I am your humble servant. And when this body-consciousness has melted away, and there is pure 'I am' consciousness, I am a living soul: then I feel I am part of you, I am a cell in your cosmic body. When that is also gone, and there is no distinction at all: then you is me - I is you." It is in that spirit that Gurudev lived constantly, and therefore this triple relationship was experienced in his presence by everybody. He could deal with you, his disciple, in these three attitudes. He could take work from you, he could feel in some way he was one with you, and he could feel that he was part of you and you were part of him.

The next important feature associated with this was the beautiful practice of vibhuti. Vibhuti yoga was woven into his daily life, he was extremely fond of it. It goes on to be the basis for all the other yogas combined into integral yoga. Integral yoga can be regarded as a functional aspect of vibhuti yoga. In the tenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes certain specific manifestations as his own - the moon, the Himalayas, the Ganges etc. Yad-yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ sṛjmad ūrjitam eva vā tad-tad evā 'vagaccha tvam mama tejaśasambhavam. "All these are my own manifestations, feel

this and be devoted to these." (X 41) These vibhutis are mentioned only as samples, not as an exhaustive list. Learn to see God in these. As soon as he came out of his kutir, the first thing he saw was the Ganges - salutations. It takes not more than one tenth of a second to do this; you see the Ganges, ah here is a manifestation of God. You look at the Himalayas, here is a manifestation of God. These two concepts arise simultaneously and immediately. One is Ganges, the other is God. Here is Ganges, that is God. The objectivity is not obliterated from your vision, it is not that you walk about like one in a daze, but the sight of the Ganges or the Himalayas or whatever provides a constant reminder of the omnipresence of God.

He was a great sage, a vedantin, he was enlightened, he was all that, but he was also extremely regular in his own Murti Puja. There was a little picture of Krishna in the room and there was a little lamp burning in front of it day and night and everyday after his bath he used to do his own little puja. He would say his own mantras for two to five minutes but without puja he never started the day.

He used to go and bathe in the Ganges, stand in the Ganges waist deep, and very quickly without anybody noticing it, offer some prasadam and repeat some mantras. He was extremely fond of the Ganges and till the day he was unable to climb down those steps he would get into the water and splash a little, swim a little - it was like a baby swimming on the breast of the mother. This is a manifestation of God. So right from the dawn of the day, without interrupting your kartavya, your duty, let whatever you see remind you of God. He had his own mantras, he would repeat a few of them in the Ganges: Om namah sivaya, Om namo Narayanaya, Om namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya, the Shree Vidya mantra, Tattvam asi, Aham brahma-smi, and the Praise Mantra or the Paramahansa Gayatri. Then, looking at the sky, he would repeat: "Akasavat sarva gata nitya." "Like the self also is omnipresent and eternal." That is what Krishna taught. Don't think you can seclude yourself in a cave and keep saying "Hare Ram, Hare Ram"; it wouldn't be possible, you will have to come out and do your work. But neither should you think that merely by working you

can attain salvation. That again is not possible. Combine the two. How? By seeing God, and God alone, in all - in all beings. That was the secret by which he was able to appreciate artists, musicians, dancers and even fighters and gymnasts. There was a fellow who came in 1948 from Ceylon and demonstrated his strength. Somebody picked up a huge rock and dropped it on his chest, nothing happened. He walked away. Gurudev admired all that. That strength is God, in that man's cleverness is God. In this girl's musical talent is God. In this lady's grace in dancing is God. Whatever there may be in this world which is beautiful, which is flourishing, which is prosperous, there in that beauty or prosperity is God.

In Rishikesh in the early days, we used to sleep on the temple veranda in summer. And there was a swami who used to do the puja at that time. At eleven o'clock at night everything is locked. At half past three the temple is opened again for the morning puja. One day this swami was horrified to see that some silver vessels had been stolen. And with a little bit of fear he came down to the office when Gurudev had arrived, saluted, prostrated, Swamiji also greeted him, "How are you?" "Everything is wonderful, Swamiji." "Then there must be something else for which you have come?" So he told Gurudev what had happened. "Huh, abya - Hare - he must be a very clever thief. He has found out when you close the door and when you open it again - and who sleeps where, and how soundly, and without waking anybody up he has cut the chain and opened the door, collected all these things and gone away.

Even the cleverness of that thief is divine, is a manifestation of God. Then he said in fun, "If the thief is caught, I will award him a title. An ordinary thief is sometimes foolish and gets caught. Here is a man who is very clever. That was the attitude, but please don't let me give you the impression that he was callous or indifferent towards the ashram property or whatever it is. I have also seen him pick up from the road or the path or the floor of the ashram clips, pins or needles. Very carefully he would pick them up, put them in his bag and go away. Not to waste anything is the principle, but when something has happened, not to regret or worry about it either.

So once you have cultivated the habit of seeing God in all, something else happens. He would come out of his room, and as he saw you with folded palms, he would salute you with: "Hara hara, tat tvam asi, namah sivāya, namo nārāyaṇāya, namo bhagavate vāsudevāya, namo bhagavate venkatesāya." It was not done mechanically, nothing that Gurudev ever did was mechanical. If he bowed down to you, his whole being bowed down to you, there was no hypocrisy, no showiness, nothing, If he said, "Om namo bhagavate Ganga Rāni" you could see from his face that he felt it. So one develops this faculty of seeing God in all faces as a culmination of this vibhuti yoga. First let all these manifestations remind you of God, and by and by let this consciousness expand so you learn to see God in every face. It is then that nirahamkāra sevā becomes true and selfless service. You are serving God, and then you look within, the ego is not there, and it is God's own energy that flows through you, through this body. This is a vital point to remember, I am not an instrument in the hands of God, but this body-mind complex is an instrument in the hands of God. Through this, God serves his own manifestation in all beings. Towards the external objects there is Nārāyaṇa bhāva or Atmā bhāva, and psychologically there is this Nimitta bhāvana. When these two are combined, then life becomes divine.

VIII

Gurudev's Integral Yoga rests on these two fundamentally vital factors, one, to see God in every face, and two, to ensure that the body-mind complex, which has somehow been considered an individual personality, becomes a free-flowing channel for the divine will, grace, or power. Therefore the whole thing appears to be one of selfless service, nishkarma seva, and it has to partake of the vital elements of what we usually consider other yogas. In Gurudev's mind there was no other yoga. There was only one yoga, Integral Yoga - yoga means integration; so "Integral Yoga" is already a redundant expression.

Gurudev often used to liken the best devotee and the best yogi to Krishna's flute. The more empty it is, the more divine the music. So, the first part involves what we have come to regard as Bhakti yoga, and the second part involves what we have come to regard as raja yoga - dhyana yoga - jnana yoga. Therefore he included in his sadhana vital elements of the bhakti sadhana. Why do I say vital elements and not just bhakti? When we think ("think" is the most important word in the sentence) of bhakti, we have an image, and the image is made up of largely showy emotionalism. One must wear some kind of a tilak and some kind of a cloth around one's shoulders; whether the man repeats "om namah sivāya" once or twice a day or not, he has a whole shirt and shawl made of om namah sivāya. Or he must sing and shout and do all kinds of things. All these practices may have their own benefits, but these according to Gurudev's life and teachings are of secondary importance.

There were some vital practices in his sadhana. First and foremost of these was Murthi Puja. Amongst Gurudev's initial devotees were great Arya Samajis who don't like Murthi Puja at all. As a matter of fact Gurudev even attended the wedding in the house of one such devotee. He mixed freely with them and even sang the maha mantra. Gurudev himself has said somewhere that when he presided over sankirtan conferences, even Arya Samajis who came to criticise and disrupt the proceedings, joined in and started dancing. When he performed murthi puja, it was not as many of us do it, regarding the statue as a statue, as a stone, but as a living presence. There was this deep-seated realization, not conviction but realization, that it is God I am worshipping, not a stone. He did not even use the expression, through this I am worshipping God. Through this stone image, which somehow represents Lord Krishna, I am worshipping God. No. I am worshipping Krishna here. This is Krishna.

I used to be Pujari in the temple for quite a number of years, and Gurudev used to come three times a day and every time with some flowers or bael leaves he entered the temple, it was an unforgettable and indescribable sight. I used to stand with my back towards the window and watch Gurudev's

face. He used to look up, and in that look there was distinctly and definitely the unmistakable look of greeting a friend. During Shivratri particularly there used to be puja in the evening, and after the arati some people used to be given bael leaves and it was customary to drop some leaves on the *Mundi*, the bull, as a token of seeking the bull's permission for worshipping Siva, and then they used to offer a few bael leaves or flowers on the Siva lingam. I have never seen Gurudev throw a flower or a leaf - he placed it so softly. Why? Because it is a living thing, it is a living divine presence. If I throw flowers at your face, I don't think you will appreciate it very much. When he looked at Krishna, it was friendship, supreme intimate friendship. "Hello, how do you do?" You could almost read it in his eyes. "Ah, how are you, alright today?" Just as he used to ask me and you and everybody, "What would you like to have, some tea or some coffee?" - that same blissful look of intimate friendship.

In the office where he used to sit, a few pictures hung in front of him from the ceiling, and those pictures had to be there in that order, they were not pictures at all. They were living beings, the divine presence. As soon as he walked into the office he just tossed a glance at them. If somebody meddled with them, "Hmm, what has happened to that!" Because my friends have gone, they are my friends and assistants here in my work, and they have been disrupted. In all this there was absolute and total naturalness, there was no showiness at all. We greet each other, laugh at each other, make fun of each other - "Nārāyaṇā!" He would never do that. And sometimes we shout while stretching or when we hurt ourselves, "Hare Ram, Hare Ram." All that showiness was completely absent, but deep within him he believed, he taught and his life was a continual demonstration of the fact that this bhakti is a totally intimate love affair between your soul and God. No one need know, you don't have to parade it, you don't have to exhibit it to anyone else.

I mentioned a minute ago that he used to look at those pictures, even that was done in a very subtle almost imperceptible way. Unless you were very carefully watching you couldn't have noticed it. Sometimes he would close his eyes and just

with one eye, lift it up and take a look and close the eyes again. In those five seconds some magic thread was re-established. Very often we think that we are so highly advanced - that worship is unnecessary. He never forgot his worship. Only when he could not come to the temple did he confine himself to the worship in his own room.

He was very fond of sankirtan, the use of mantra in several different forms. In sankirtan again there was no ostentation. If sankirtan has to be sung aloud, sing it aloud, but without ostentation, not doing it for the sake of showing others. There was no demonstration in his case. Do you know what demonstration means? Spell the word and count the first five letters! He was not interested in demonstration - it was within him. Bhakti is an affair of the heart and nobody need know. Perhaps the less known your love for God is, the more powerful, the more sincere it is likely to be. One has to see this. He was thrilled when someone sang God's names with bhav and devotion. And that is the characteristic of a devotee. He was so full of divine love that he was delighted even if others sang God's names. And the externalisation of this devotion was adapted to suit the context. If there was a big audience, such as the birthday celebration, we used to have a big satsang. Gurudev would stand up and start singing and dancing maybe about 1 o'clock at night on the 31st of December. He had a powerful voice, it could ring throughout the Himalayas. When he sang people would shed tears. If he did Om chanting before an audience of a couple of thousand people, it was ringing, loud, for the occasion demanded it, but when during satsang he sang kirtan it was only meant for the few that were around him, so it was in a subdued mellow beautiful voice. And Gurudev used to say, in the beginning when there were not even musicians present in the ashram, "You should sit in a meditative posture and sing kirtan as if you are meditating, and while you are singing kirtan feel within yourself that the Lord himself is seated in front of you listening to your kirtan." That's a very different spirit altogether! That is a different quality. You have seen the picture of Geordie singing and little Krishna sitting and listening. That is what Gurudev wanted; otherwise it becomes a totally

externalised affair. When the affairs of the heart are externalised they lose their value completely, they become useless, they become showy, spiritless, essenceless. Devotion or bhakti being an affair of the heart, it must be felt there, experienced there, and so we experience the welling up of devotion, and the divine presence itself. God himself is sitting close to you, listening, so no need to shout. So during satsang it was very soft, but inspiring and devotional.

During ~~old~~ kirtan - we used to have ~~old~~ kirtan a few times a year - the whole night we used to sit in the temple singing Om Namah Sivāya. Once Gurudev was sitting leaning against the left side pillar of the temple, with closed eyes, and since nobody was leading the Om Namah Sivaya chant, one half would repeat once and the other half would repeat the next time. He was also part of one group and he was chanting the Om Namah Sivaya in such low tones right at the back of his throat. I happened to be near him and heard this. I thought aha, if you repeat it like that maybe you enter into samadhi more easily, and maybe you don't get tired or sleepy. So sitting right behind him I also started. I was asleep in one minute! And yet he was sitting there unmoved, without even changing his seat for the whole night, repeating this Om Namah Sivaya in a very low tone. There it is a totally and completely meditative mood. When he saw others dozing he would say, "Oh, get up, get up and sing or clap." That was the one occasion when we were allowed to clap our hands while singing kirtan, or to use cymbals, or the clappers or even the harmonium or tabla. There the important thing was to keep awake, if you awake it is enough, what happens in your heart we will see later. But in his own case it was deep, deep within him! In the case of japa also, when he used to conduct meditation classes, he used to start the class with "Om," and the Om sound came from his navel. He also used to go to his kutir and pace the veranda up and down, very deeply uttering the om kāra. What it is to see God in every face might come later.

What is the inner experience when you are face to face with God? If you know that experience, then you can ensure that the same experience is had when you see this little boy. First you must acquire that experience wherever you like,

maybe in a temple, maybe in front of a great swami or holy man or yogi, maybe in front of your guru. The experience has to manifest in your heart. And once that experience is manifest and you have tasted it, watch and see if the same experience arises in you when you meet every person. Then you can really say, "I see God in every face." That was one vital aspect of his sadhana, whatever there was, puja, worship, and the celebration of holy days like Durga Puja and sankirtan. Through all this he sustained this peace of divine love, constantly he sustained this attitude of seeing God, and seeing God in every face.

We all worship Krishna in the temple, we offer flowers and fruits in front of Krishna and sweets at his feet. "Oh Krishna I love you, please accept this, I have brought it specially for you from Delhi." And that Krishna doesn't smile, that Krishna doesn't nod, that Krishna doesn't say, "Thank you", he says nothing, and yet you feel quite happy within yourself that the lord has accepted your service and you go away fully satisfied. Wouldn't you do the same if you saw God in the face of the person whom you are serving? Yet you take some flowers and fruits when you meet a Swami, put them at his feet, "Namaskāra Swami," and if he doesn't care to nod, or smile you are offended!

So here again if you are able to feel the divine presence in the temple, then it is possible that by and by you will see God in every face. The next is to ensure that the body-mind complex is an egoless, free-flowing channel for the divine grace, which is meditation. And Gurudev's meditation was continuous. Whenever he mentioned meditation, what he really meant was japa. It is through mantra japa you enter into - no, you don't even enter into meditation. You go on doing japa and meditation supervenes, meditation takes hold of you. Meditation is like sleep, which cannot be practised. You cannot practise sleep. Your consciousness can be led towards it, but then it has to come. You can invite it, you can do all manner of things, but sleep has to come, and if it has to come, it will come here right now! So when Gurudev used the word meditation in personal conversation, it always meant japa. When a new aspirant came and asked for instruction, he

always said, "Do japa! Take a mantra." Sometimes he would give a mantra, any mantra is as good as any other mantra. It depends entirely upon your appreciation, your faith, upon your sincerity and dedication. Having given the mantra Gurudev would instruct aspirant how to use it.

As soon as you wake up - not get up - as soon as you open your eyes in the morning, start repeating the mantra. If you are alone in the room you can say it aloud or whisper it or if you are not alone you may do it mentally. After a few minutes when you are fully awake, get out of bed, wash your face quickly and come back and sit in your asana for more japa. This time you can use a mala. And then synchronize the mantra with the breath, this is the trick: then the breathing itself becomes the japa mala. Repeat the mantra once while inhaling, repeat the mantra once while exhaling, and form this habit. Once the habit is formed this mantra repetition or japa will become natural, second nature to you. Then, to make it even more firmly grounded, devote a few seconds to it every hour or every two hours. That is what Gurudev used to do in the office. He would be signing letters or talking to people or examining addresses on parcels, and he would lean back and close his eyes. You think he is fatigued, you think he is resting, he is not resting. No one knew what he was doing. Sometimes I noticed when he was in the office, one eye would be half-closed only. The right eye was completely closed, the left eye only half closed. I have never dared to ask him what it meant. There was a completely blank expression there. My first impression was that something had happened. Then I saw he was deliberately doing it. There he was for a few moments. Nobody knew what he did, but for a few moments he had re-established that link with the mantra. That can be done: just synchronize the mantra with the breath and listen to it. And at the end of the day, before you go to bed, the mantra can be repeated properly, sitting in your meditation room in your meditation posture. Gurudev used to insist that before you go to bed you should spend half an hour at least in japa. It is not a waste of time. You will have a better sleep and a more restful, more blissful, more fruitful sleep. And if his sleep was disturbed, the disturbed period of his sleep was also

spent in japa.

This japa mantra itself will lead you to meditation if you have faith and dedication, if you are cautious and careful. Because one day or the other you are bound to question what it is that is repeating this mantra "I". Who is I? Where does the sound come from? From me. Who is me? When that quest arises, there is meditation. You are not meditating, you are merely entering into this quest. Who is repeating this mantra? From where does it come? I hear the sound of the mantra within without vocalizing it. How is it possible to have a sound without making a sound? When such inquiry arises from within, the mantra japa goes on and it merges into meditation. When it is realized that this meditation is happening, this mantra japa is happening without my volition, without my will, without my individuality participating in it, then all actions in life happen without the "me".

IX

We have been considering the principal aspects of sadhana as expounded by Gurudev and illustrated in his life. I think we should remind ourselves once again that neither the teachings nor the illustrations in his life could be positively described as "this is it". Then you miss it - it is neither/nor, the extremely subtle middle path. What is considered the middle path is imperceptible and, if we invent a new word, inconceptable. Not only imperceptible but it is inconceptable. You cannot form a concept with it. Gurudev had supreme renunciation but not as a concept. Gurudev had the highest form of karma yoga, but not as a concept, not limited to it, not only this.

Why do we slip into specialization instead of following the subtle middle path, the path of neither/nor? Because in this neither/nor yoga, in pursuing this subtle middle path, one has to be constantly vigilant. One little wink or nod and you slip on one side or the other. Of course by God's grace

you wake up and go on, Because the subtle middle path is neither this nor that, but something which partakes of both. That is what we have to bear in mind throughout our study of the life as well as teachings of Shri Gurudev. If we forget this, then we become fanatic, and that is almost contrary to what Gurudev was.

So far we have gone over his teachings concerning what we call karma yoga and what we call bhakti. And it was pointed out that even the essential raja yoga sadhana of meditation was made to flow on from the bhakti practice of japa. "Flow on reminds me of a beautiful thought which I would like to share with you. These yogas - karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, and hatha yoga and what have you - these are not separate watertight compartments but can be compared to the seasons. This is an example which is given in the Yoga Vasishtha. One season flows into the other, it is not as though one fine morning winter comes to an end and spring commences. One season flows, it is an unceasing flow; in the same way one yoga blends into another. This was his own word. Karma yoga blends with bhakti yoga etc. If it does not, there is something wrong somewhere. You are chewing the words, hoping that you might get enlightened or illumined. Gurudev's as well as Krishna's is an intelligent practice of yoga, not a bland ritual, not a superstitious, repetitive, mechanical set of practices, nor a set of dogmas to which we could give our intellectual assent - it is intelligence in operation, it is intelligence alive. Previously jnana yoga was isolated from the rest on the understanding that first we practise karma yoga, and once our heart becomes purified, then we go to the temple, and once we develop a little devotion, then we sit down and practise a little raja yoga. All this may take some two hundred years, never mind, we come back again and again and pursue, and then we will go to the forest, go to a guru and learn the Upanishads from him.

The Sanyasins in Rishikesh sit and listen to the Upanishads at the feet of Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj, because Shri Gurudev insisted that these too shall form part of our daily sadhana. This aspect of jnana yoga was introduced into

our life as Swadhyaya. I don't know what this word Swadhyaya literally means, but to me the first two syllables suggest something. Swa means self, dhya - dhyaana , meditation. Maybe it is swadhyaya - someone sitting alone and reading a scripture - I don't know. It is also possible to see that while I am reading it there is contemplation. It is not a mechanical reading of the scripture but an intelligent reading of the scripture. Gurudev often repeated, "Study daily a chapter of the Gita". Why must I go on studying this? We ask this question only when it comes to the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads. You do not ask this question when it comes to a physics text book or Shakespearean drama. We read these again and again, we even memorize them. Why? In order that the message may be inscribed on the tablet of one's heart. These words are also Gurudev's. This Swadhyaya or daily reading (I'm deliberately avoiding the use of the word study) of the Gita, Ramayana, Upanishads or other scriptures, the Bible or the Koran, is like the continuous flow of a river.

You have heard it said that you cannot take a bath in the same water twice. Every moment the water is flowing, as you dip and come up and dip again, it's fresh water, not the water in which you had your previous dip. Something has happened. Here it's the other way round. The scripture seems to be the same, but you who read the scripture, you are not the same. You are not the same as you were last year. Something has happened, and therefore keep on reading this and it is possible you will discover that newer and newer facets of meaning are revealed to you. That is the beauty of Swadhyaya. That sounds mechanical, perhaps and therefore Gurudev said, Swadhyaya is important, but not the mechanical type. Keep your heart open, keep your mind open, be alert and vigilant as you read this, whether you understand the meaning or not. Let your heart be open.

How did he achieve that? I was particularly interested in this because as Vaishnava Brahmins of South India we had become accustomed to this routine, mechanical reading of at least Valmiki's Ramayana. We didn't read the Gita or the Upanishads. But we were asked to recite at least one chapter of Valmiki's Ramayana before breakfast, otherwise we wouldn't

get our coffee. I still remember the delightfully jet-age speed with which we read the Ramayana! Why? The mind was on the coffee, not on the Ramayana. We weren't interested in the Rama story and we didn't even bother to look up the story, we just read it in Sanskrit, it was considered a ritual. That was not enough. Swadhyaya is necessary, but not that.

Don't however come up with the other extreme, saying, I must understand every word of it, every syllable. Neither total ignorance nor complete understanding, somewhere in the middle. Read it, try to understand it, open your heart. If you don't understand something, leave it. That was done miraculously and most beautifully in the satsanga. Gurudev combined these two so beautifully, the satsanga and the swadhyaya. What is satsanga? I think most of you know. I was exposed as a young boy to the satsanga of the South Indian variety. You know how it is spelt - satsang - that is precisely what happened. They sat and they sang. And it used to be glorious, beautiful, classical. I must explain this too. Often classical means not musical. If you don't want to hear it, it is called classical music. Very classical but often very musical too. They were supposed to be singing God's names, but where is your attention? Your attention is on what raga he is singing in, what tala he is singing in, who is making a mistake, who is singing a wrong note, the attention is not on God. So there was "sat" and "sang", but no bhavana. Gurudev liked kirtan but it had to be full of bhav, his whole mission started with sankirtan conferences. But not that type of emotionalism, it had to be sankirtan, but not emotional, not demonstrative, not showy, and he used to insist that when you sing kirtan, feel that God himself is sitting in front of you listening.

Now to combine all of these. Swadhyaya had to be combined, not blind reading, nor an insistence upon understanding the entire philosophy. "I must become enlightened tomorrow morning" and "I must not read anything which I do not understand". Neither of these two extremes. Sankirtan must be done without any emotionalism, but with some bhavana. Neither this nor that. And he beautifully combined all this in the satsanga we had in the ashram in those days, especially before

1950, 1951. The satsanga as it was in those days had an extraordinary quality of being integral yoga in itself, being an immediate combination of sankirtan, contemplation or dhyana and swadhyaya (devotion) all together. Devotion being an exercise in contemplation and an exercise in dhyana yoga.

What Gurudev did was an extraordinary and beautiful thing. Obviously there were not so many people in those days, hardly about fifteen or twenty. In summer satsang used to be held on the veranda of Gurudev's kutir and in winter it was held in the bhajan hall. In the bhajan hall he sat next to the door. In his kutir he sat at the north end of the main veranda. There used to be a small thin piece of folded cloth, that was merely to indicate where Gurudev was to sit. Right on time he would come out of his kutir and sit there. There was no electricity, no light, except for a wicklamp at the altar and a hurricane lamp to read by. Gurudev had a flashlight which was half a walking stick long. He would put it next to him and look at the person who sat at his right. That's all, then he closed his eyes. Immediately he opened his eyes the swami who was sitting to his left would start the "Jaya Ganesha". It was routine, then the next person would read one chapter of the Gita, sometimes with meaning, sometimes without. Once his reading was over he would lead with a kirtan, and then the lamp was passed on to the next person. He would probably read a few mantras from the Upanishads, with or without meaning, and follow it with a kirtan. The lamp was passed on to the next one - Bhagavatam. Then somebody might even have to read an article by Gurudev, if it was topical and useful. Then the hurricane lantern was put out and discarded, from there on everyone had to lead, not merely follow in chorus, but lead in singing a kirtan. So it was not a one-man performance which others enjoyed, but everybody had to play a part.

Two very interesting incidents I might narrate here. One was when a girl had come from South India. She said, "I do not know how to sing kirtan, what you call kirtan. I could sing bhajan but my throat is hoarse, I have a little cold." Swamiji said, "Ah, go and get some medicine." This poor girl had to swallow this bitter medicine because she said she had

a sore throat. Gurudev always took everyone seriously. He was not going to be taken for a ride. The routine always had to be continued. One person had finished his reading and the lantern had been passed on, which meant that the next person had to lead in a kirtan. When there was a silence, it meant that somebody was evading. It was then that this flashlight was used. He would pick up the flashlight, shine it right on his face. "Ahh, ohji, sing!" "Ah, no swamiji. I don't know how to sing!" "Sing!" "I'm not used to singing in this manner." "Sing!" Unless he at least said, "Ram Nam" twice he wouldn't be excused, he could be the Maharaja of Mysore, it didn't matter. No one was excused.

We have a gurubai, who's now in Gangotri, Swami Sharadananda, a wonderful man. When he came the first night Gurudev said, "Come on," "I don't know any kirtans, Swamiji." "No, no, Ram nam." He was quiet for one moment, then suddenly he remembered the "Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram Patita Pavana Sita Ram". He had heard it whenever the Congress had a procession in his local town. Of course I remember it. So all of us had to repeat it in the same tune. You dared not change his tune. He was the leader. So all of us followed in chorus. He was thrilled, he enjoyed it. Such a wonderful innocent childlike person, Swami Sharadananda. Swamiji said "Sing!" so he went on singing without changing the tune or changing the tone, without changing the words - nothing! He went on six times, seven times. Swamiji asked me to sing, he didn't ask me to stop! Then Gurudev cut in, "Jai Ramachandra ki jai".

So everyone had to sing. When Gurudev heard the last person sitting on his right lead the kirtan in this manner, then he brought the satsang to a close, sometimes he would merely sing the maha mantra kirtan, or on rare occasions some of his own poems and things like that. This was the pattern of the satsang. Later Hareshwaranandaji came and a few nice little stories were introduced now and then. Then came musicians and physicians and what have you, so the satsang took all sorts of forms.

But let's go back to the original satsang. In it was a combination of bhakti, which is sankirtan. The sankirtan was

not for show and in it was contemplation. When you are listening to the scriptural readings you are watching your mind, you are listening to the scripture with your heart open, your mind silent. In it was most valuable study. What happens when we say, "I am a scholar, I will study the Bhagavad Gita"? I don't think you watch yourself. What happens when you say, "I've got the Bible, I've learned it at Sunday school"? You tend to take the same passage or chapter again and again and again. Your own favourite chapter becomes your continued favourite. There are some unpleasant truths in the Bible, there are some unpleasant truths in the Bhagavad Gita. There are some unpleasant truths in other scriptures, I don't want to look at them at all. I am very happy with this. That means once again your ego is very cosily asleep, never exposed to the truth. One had to read from cover to cover. One day or another your heart will also be exposed to the truth that you have been shying away from. Then it hits you. By God, I never read this chapter! I never saw this.

Once we were discussing the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible, when I mentioned the expression, "Resist not evil". Somebody who was supposed to be a scholar jumped up and said, "I have never heard that in the Bible". He had been reading all the other chapters very religiously but avoiding this, it didn't suit him. In that satsang that simple thing was combined, bhakti, jnana and dhyana. That was not all. After all, if the message of the scriptures enters our heart, it will come alive and it must become active. Gurudev often reminded us that the scripture must come alive in you. That the truths of the Upanishads must come from your heart. I have heard the words, and now in my daily life, during my activities, I am watching to see if the truths of the Upanishads are coming from my heart or not. So it is not enough to study or listen to the scriptures but the truths must also come from the heart. This is true - now what do you think? The moment one hears the reaction of one's own mind, "Ah, you know I am not yet ready for the Upanishads, so you know..." Neither this nor that. Neither must the Upanishads or the scriptures be confined to your mind, nor should the consideration, "I'm not yet mature enough for the study of the scripture", be the reason

for not studying it. So I must study it and I must try my best to live up to it, but without the anxiety that accompanies this kind of trying. I must honestly imbibe the teachings of the scriptures and follow them, but not with the sense of anxiety, "Oh what am I going to do? I'm not able to practise this, oh what must I do?" Without this anxiety, can I listen to the scriptures, inscribe the teachings on the tablet of my heart, keep my heart open to the light, without anxiety and without ego participation? I am not saying I am enlightened, I am not saying I am anxious that I may not become enlightened. Without anxiety and without hypocrisy, let the heart be open to the reception of this light, and the magic will happen.

I'm sure those of you who have been to Gurudev's satsang know that this magic happens. It's a very subtle magic - spiritual growth is not a very dramatic growth. We have all grown. I can even picture Gita playing the Krishna Lila outside my old kutir. Gurudev used to preside over it. She was a little girl then, now she has grown, but if I ask her, "When did you grow from three feet to four feet?", she will answer that it didn't happen in one day, and she has been looking into the mirror every morning. I am sure it is impossible for her to say, "I looked at the mirror this morning, my nose is half an inch longer than it was last night." It doesn't happen that way. Real growth is imperceptible. I look at my shaven head, it's the same every day. If one morning I look and find a real growth here, then I will probably run panic-stricken to the nearest doctor. It may be a tumour, it may be a cancer. A growth that is noticeable is often cancerous. Spiritual growth is so subtle and beautiful. And that subtle and beautiful spiritual growth is effectively brought about by this satsanga, if it is conducted in the way in which Gurudev taught us. Without anxiety and without hypocrisy.

One beautiful incident I might narrate is an illustration of this last thing. Gurudev was not anxious at all when it came to putting the scripture into practice. Once a few of us were there on Gurudev's veranda. It was winter and he was in his big overcoat and had a nice shawl as a scarf around his neck and I think stockings too. The refrain of his talk that evening was, "They are truly blessed who are quite content

with a loin cloth, who roam free clad in the loin cloth." And the person who says this is clad in an overcoat and scarves and so on! Sometimes you and I feel self-conscious, anxious, afraid of criticism - look at him! He is saying something and doing something else. Truth is truth, and that is always truth whether you are able to practise it or not. It is still truth, and truth is unchangeable, and that is why it is called truth. "He who is contented with the loin cloth and owns nothing in this world, he is a blessed man." This is the truth. That Gurudev had to wear an overcoat on that occasion may be due to something else, but that does not detract from the strength and power in his voice, in his words.

So without any anxiety whatsoever, and without making it a mere ritual of listening, one should listen to the scriptures, study the scriptures, and if it is done in satsang in this manner it becomes extremely effective. The scriptures studied are read, and then, while the person is leading the kirtan, all the others have an opportunity of letting the message soak through the heart of their being. At the end of the satsang we had two or three minutes of silent meditation and the arati, and then as soon as the satsang was over, especially when it was in his kutir, "Om Namah Sivaaya", he would quietly walk into his room, he wouldn't even look at anybody. He used to ask others also to do so; without disturbing the satsang mood, go to your room and sleep!

X

We have so far been discussing some of the important; and, from the spiritual aspirant's point of view, vital aspects of the life and teachings of Shri Gurudev. Those of you who have been attentive might have felt that his entire sadhana or integral yoga is not so much the outcome but the very blossoming of total selflessness. Anahamkara. It is only when the self is discovered to be non-existent that its play stops. Our life is plagued by the play of the self.

Selfishness and all the rest of it are based upon a false notion of a self which is assumed to be true. And then one half of humanity struggles to fulfil, to pander to the needs of this self, and the other half of humanity suggests that this self must be crushed, eliminated.

From a close observation of Gurudev's life there arose the feeling that, either way, the self was created and brought into being. When you stand facing a wall with your back to a lamp and you see a shadow on the wall, whether you admire that shadow or you struggle to remove it, you are creating a thing called shadow. The shadow suddenly becomes a thing, and however much you struggle it is not possible to remove it, and by trying to apply some lipstick and powder to it you are wasting your time and deluding yourself. Both these attempts are useless.

We started by saying that in order to make the lips smile we have to tickle the foot and not pull the cheeks apart. And so, in order to do nishkama karma yoga or nirahamkara karma yoga, it is no use battling with the ego in order to meditate. You may wish to remove or deal with the intruding thoughts, but you soon discover that it is no use battling with them. Gurudev used to sing, "When evil thoughts enter your mind, do not drive them out forcibly; substitute divine thoughts and they will pass away, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram." It's no use battling with these evil thoughts. Then you are making them stronger. When you try to remove what appears to be selfishness, you are creating it, making it stronger. Tickle the foot somewhere else. The key is somewhere else. So in order to practise nishkama karma yoga, nirahamkara karma yoga, one has to discover the self and become aware of the truth of the non-existence of the thing called self. In the same way, in order to practise bhakti yoga, to love God and to do self-surrender, one has to see that there never was a self which had to be surrendered. In the same way, one has to meditate and in meditation discover that this self has never been non-existent. What was, is and will be, was, is and will be! "Nasatho vidyatebhavo na'bhavo vidyate satah." That which is illusory does not exist, don't battle with it. When you battle with it, you are creating it. The reality is there,

why don't you get closer to that? That was the essence of Gurudev's attitude to life itself, not merely to the practice of yoga. If this is seen or realized to be the basis of integral yoga, you instantly realize that, whatever may be the branch of this integral yoga that may suit your temperament and which may therefore be the predominant constituent of your integral yoga, you cannot help combining all practices at the same time, including what is called meditation. It is impossible to do nirahamkara karma yoga without being at the same time in a state of constant meditation, constant devotion, constant jnana. All these are constant.

It is usual when someone expounds any form of yoga to emphasize what are known as yama and niyama. So far we have not mentioned these two words. But, when one observes the life and daily conduct as well as the teachings of Shri Gurudev, one realises that this yama and niyama happen! When you practise integral yoga, yama and niyama just happen!

Most of you know what yama and niyama mean, but without questioning the orthodox interpretations of these two words, we might take a look at them from a different angle. Most of us know that the word yama also means the name of the god of death. In raja yoga, yama signifies a five-fold self-discipline, and in mythology Yama is the name of the god of death. Gurudev used to insist in the early days, "Remember God, remember death." If you put these two together you become an abode of virtues. Virtue does not spring from a desire even for attaining liberation or God-realization. Then there still remains a motive. I'll give you a rather crude example just for illustration. A gentleman in Europe came in contact with a swami and that swami was a vegetarian and all that - vegetarian, celibate. He told this gentleman that if you do not become a pure vegetarian and celibate you cannot attain God-realization. The man immediately took a vow: "From hereafter I'll become a vegetarian etc." But he didn't like vegetarian food, he missed something very vital in his diet. Anyhow he was progressing in sadhana I suppose, when suddenly another holy man walked into his life and that holy man asked for chicken for lunch. "Huh, you are a swami?" "What has that got to do with my spirituality? Don't you know what Jesus

Christ said? 'It is not what goes in but what comes out that matters!'" And immediately the man heard this, he dropped his vegetarian thing and became non-vegetarian again.

That's it. If there is a motivation or a desire that prompts the virtue, then, as soon as that motivation or desire is questioned, the virtue is cancelled. So we are told that yama is important. We are vicious only because we have kept death away from our life. Bring death into your daily life, you will at once become virtuous. That is what Gurudev told us, remember God, remember death.

One incident comes to my mind just now. There was a retired schoolmaster from South India who had come to the ashram with the intention of spending the rest of his life there. On the Ganges bank at Gurudev's feet. Winter set in. November was a bit shivery, December was a bit difficult, and he also had a temperature for a few days. One day as Gurudev was coming up from his kutir, this retired schoolmaster met him at the top of the steps. "Swamiji, I want to go home, I'll come back later." Gurudev said, "What's wrong? You wanted to stay here, die here." "But this cold is too much, I can't bear this cold," he said. Gurudev as usual closed one eye, looked at him and smiled. He was much younger than Gurudev. Gurudev looked at him and smiled and said, "Ah, be prepared to die. You will get acclimatised to any place!" A beautiful expression!

Be prepared to die, you will get acclimatised to any place. So, is it possible for us to bring this death into our daily life? It is not as though I am completely alive now and that only on a certain day in the future will I cease to be. Death is happening even now as we are sitting and talking and listening. Death is happening to some cells in the body, some part of the body is dying. Why not bring this death into your daily life? Immediately you become virtuous. All the five canons of yama - ahimsa, brahmacharya and all that - become your second nature if this death is brought into your daily life. This is what we learned from Gurudev. It is not by battling to acquire a thing called virtue, it is not by battling to get rid of vice that you can really become

virtuous, but by doing something else. Why is it called vice? Because it grips you. How do you get out of something which grips you? No amount of your wriggling is going to help you out of it. But when you do something like tickling the foot, when you remember death and remember God at the same time, then virtue springs forth spontaneously without being invited. And when virtue springs forth spontaneously, vices just drop away. They have no meaning, they have no sense. The self is seen to be non-existent. This was Gurudev's speciality. In his case again, what you and I might regard as superhuman virtue was so natural that we have never heard him boast about it. In our case, when you and I grind our teeth and gird up our loins and practise this virtue, my God, the whole world is deafened with our boasting.

I have never heard Gurudev say anything like that, except on that one occasion when he was provoked, that is, when he opened a window, as it were, on his own life and told us some things that might be of use to you and me. Not because he was wanting to boast, for the events that he narrated had taken place years and years ago. But so that you and I might be benefitted. Virtue had become so natural, such second nature, that there was no sense of "I couldn't have been otherwise, I couldn't have done otherwise!" That was the nature of Gurudev's work here and that is what he reminded us of constantly. If, on the other hand, you struggle and somehow you succeed in subduing a vice, it is there lying in wait for you to relax your attention. Then, pow! It jumps up. Gurudev himself used to warn all spiritual aspirants, "Beware of reaction". Any violent effort or endeavour to control the senses and to control the mind may lead to equally violent reaction. Whereas if you are able to remember God and to remember death, if you are able to remember the reality and the changing unreality, there is no problem. Greed has no meaning, lust has no meaning, anger has no meaning, envy has no meaning, jealousy has no meaning, faced with this thing called death. I don't need to be proud of it, to stand up so you know who I am. The next moment there may be a heart attack and I may be lying at his feet, maybe he is jumping on me to revive my heart. That was it. That was the beauty. Remember God, remember death.

When it comes to niyama, again we shall abandon the raja yoga definition and take a common connotation of the word. Niyama in common parlance means regulated, systematic methodic life. And those of us who have been with Gurudev have noticed it a million times, that he was absolutely methodical. If he had to wake up at half past three, he woke up at half past three, even when the body was sick. If he had to get up and go to the bathroom at four o'clock, he got up and went to the bathroom at 4 o'clock. Never mind what the state of the body, the weather or the climate was. Absolutely methodical. Someone asked him, "You are the head of an organisation, and you are so busy meeting people and interviewing people, and you are so kind, you are considerate to your own disciples, you look after their physical welfare and their mental welfare. You do all this, you are regular in satsang, you come and participate in the meditation classes and you even come up to the temple thrice a day. When do you find time to write all these books?" And Gurudev revealed the secret in one simple word, "I am regular".

That is, a certain period of the day had been set apart for study. A certain period of the day had been set apart for book work, a certain period of the day was set apart for correspondence, a certain period of the day was set apart for meeting people, interviewing people, and nothing was done out of its time. So he said, "Two pages a day, I have been regularly writing two pages per day". In the same way with yoga asanas, in the same way with pranayama, in the same way with study, everything a little, and that done regularly, systematically, methodically. There is time for everything and everything gets done so smoothly, so easily, nothing is a strain. It is as if one compartment of the brain was opened up at eight o'clock - satsang. That compartment is open, all the rest is closed up, so that sitting in the satsang there was absolutely no tension.

"Oh, I forgot...I ought to have written so and so". That was no problem at all. That compartment will be open in half an hour's time - 9:30. And when he did attend to correspondence, all the other things were closed. Only the correspondence branch of the brain was opened up. And then it flowed.

When he had to talk, there it flowed. When he had to study, there it flowed, and when he had to write there it flowed. Niyama!

If you bestow some thought on this interpretation of this yama and niyama, you realise at once that these two, interpreted in this manner, act as effective curbs to the play of the self. Nothing is allowed to get out of hand, out of control. Everything is naturally disciplined, not disciplined because I have to. The question never arose in Gurudev's mind, "Why should there be discipline, why should I discipline myself?" There was no motivation at all, and it was because there was no motivation that discipline became natural, yama became natural.

He was once asked, "Did you have to struggle hard?" There were no obstacles at all in the meditation. Why? Because yama and niyama had become natural. This discipline of the mind had become natural. It had become part of his life, not only his spiritual life but his whole life. We saw that even just after the All-India Tour. For two months Swamiji lived in a completely different world. There was no ashram, there was no correspondence, nothing, no books, a completely different world. Those of us who were with him knew that he never thought of the ashram, not for a single moment. Then, when we came back to Rishikesh, the procession stopped outside Gurudev's kutir and he took leave of everybody, walked downstairs, had his bath. An hour later, there he was, sitting at the table in the office, and now the whole tour had been completely forgotten. Now the other compartment had been opened. "Have you sent some copies of this new book? What happened to the...?" Such an absolutely disciplined mind does not encounter any obstacles at all in the path of sadhana, in the path of yoga, in the path of meditation, and in daily life. When the sadhaka understands this and practises yama and niyama - by bringing the god of death into his daily life knowing that he may die at any moment - virtue arises spontaneously, and discipline becomes natural and effortless. When there is no effort even at self-discipline, virtue and self-control, then the self is realised to be non-existent, and it is then that selflessness, self-surrender and self-control and

self-realization become totally natural.

XI

In this Integral Yoga, is there a goal? Is there some way by which I can know, or I can reassure myself that I am on the right path, I am progressing, that I have nearly reached the goal, that I have reached the goal, or I did reach the goal the day before yesterday? How does one know? How does one ever know whether one is on the right track or not? We never discussed this with Shri Gurudev himself, but on rare occasions he gave some kind of a hint that what is called self-realization or enlightenment is not for the mind to describe nor for speech to describe that one who has reached self-realization is touching Brahman. He didn't suggest that this is the goal. He didn't even suggest whether such a person would have special vision or other such phenomena. We started these talks by narrating an incident where Gurudev said, "One who is enlightened or who has self-knowledge is ever in bliss and in peace," which again is not easy to understand. What does peace mean to us? Does peace mean a state of inertness, dullness, stupidity? What is the distinction between tamas and sattva? Once again you are at a loss. Such expressions as, "One must have peace, one must have bliss," raise more questions than answers.

When you forget all this and look at his life, what sort of clue do we get as to the state of a siddha, a perfected being, one who had reached Siddhi? It was obvious that in his case there was this cosmic vision, a vision in which there was no division. What does this mean? Does it mean that a sage does not know that this is a towel and this is a key? Would he try to open his door using a towel, and start wiping himself with a key? What does it mean? There is an expression in the Bhagavad Gita which has been grotesquely interpreted to mean that the sage wouldn't know the difference between a stone and a nugget of gold. I'm not sure it means that.

I've watched Shri Gurudev very carefully, and I have seen him pick up clips and pins from the roadside and put them into his bag, and I have at the same time seen that he took theft, cheating, calmly, as though nothing had happened. Great loss meant nothing, but one pin or a clip lying on the roadside had to be picked up. If someone cheated him of ten thousand rupees, that's alright. So there again, did he walk with his eyes turned into his eyebrows as though he were not interested at all in life? No, he was deeply interested in life, and that again is the Bhagavad Gita's definition. Saarva bhutahi divata. He would not even allow his own devoted disciples to kill the bugs that were keeping him awake at night. When we were using some insecticide Gurudev said, "No, no, don't do that, take the can, put it in the forest. Let the bugs go away, but don't kill them." So once again we are where we started. What are the signs of enlightenment. Are there any signs at all? What are the signs of total egolessness? Are there any signs at all? If there are signs, they must manifest themselves, and not be produced by the sage. Is that right? If this person is egoless, he is not going to produce signs and proofs for you to admire and give him a testimonial. He is not interested in all that. And so, whenever they who were very close to him were watching him, occasionally they would get glimpses of what egolessness may mean. But then before you tried to grasp and admire it, it changed.

I don't know if I must submit for your consideration that the surest sign of an enlightened person is unpredictability, which does not mean that all unpredictable characters are enlightened. There is a description in some scriptures of the sage. "The sage behaves like a child, or a madman or a goblin," but that does not mean that all madmen are sages. In his case we found this unpredictability. That is, there was no ego-sense to determine or predetermine an action, and direct the action towards the attainment of a certain goal: the people's admiration, more and more disciples, more and more name, more and more glory. When that goal is set up, it is easy for you to guide your life in such a way that that goal is reached. There was one swami who didn't belong to Gurudev's ashram but stayed there doing tremendous tapasya.

What was the goal? He said, "I am going to have rajas and ranis as my disciples. That's all I want." He had rajas and ranis as his disciples. He did achieve that! So the goal-oriented practice of austerities, of yoga and meditation is easy. Then it is possible to know that this is the goal and this I have reached. I know also how far I am from that goal and when I have reached that goal. But in the case of this practice of yoga we have been discussing whose aim is aimlessness, the total eradication of the ego-sense, what are the signs? Practically none at all. Now comes the crux. Since there are no goals, there is the continuing goal, which is to be vigilantly watchful for any sign of the resurrection of the ego. And here Gurudev used to insist upon this vigilance: be vigilant till the end that the ego does not come up. That the self doesn't start to play again, whether that play be superficially diagnosed as worldly or otherworldly, sacred, secular or even spiritual. Spiritual vanity is as good or as bad as vanity of wealth or pedigree. It's all the same. "I am so and so" is the devil, is the obstacle. Can that be kept away? How? When can I be sure that "I am" has been eliminated? It is an absurd question! Therefore this inner awareness or intelligence has to be kept constantly awake. Utthisthata jagrata. Utthisthata is probably fairly easy. To be awakened is fairly easy, but to be alert is not so easy. Because the mind and the ego have this wonderful habit of adapting themselves to changing circumstances. "I have given up the world, I have taken sanyasa, I have changed my name, I have shaved my head, and I don't touch this and I don't do that." The ego is capable of adapting itself to this new environment, to this new nomenclature, to this new situation. Ego hasn't changed. One may say that this is subtler, more refined, but it is of no real and serious value to a good spiritual aspirant.

There is one definition found in the Bhagavad Gita which may be regarded as some sign of enlightenment. This definition may be applicable to Shri Gurudev, which was not of course the only criterion. What is yoga? "Having attained which, he longs for naught else." This we saw in Gurudev. There was no longing, there was no eagerness to do this, to do that, except that if there was an opportunity to serve, that

opportunity was taken. Even that opportunity was not deliberately sought, but when it came along it was taken. But there was no eagerness to excel, no spirit of competition in him, that I must be better than, greater than, my ashram must be better than, greater than, more prosperous, none of these things. And even right from the days in Swargashram there was never a wish to imitate somebody else. There were quite a number of yogis around him in Swargashram. There was a great Sanskrit scholar, Tapovanandaji Maharaj, there was a great hatha yogi, Yoganandaji Maharaj, and there were bhajan experts in sankirtan and all that. He was not tempted to imitate them, he was not tempted to excel them, compete with them. There was a Maharaja called Shahinsha, I think he was a swami, but he was greater than a swami. Gurudev went to his ashram once. He was an old man, much older than Gurudev. He told us a story. It seems that when Gurudev was still living in Swargashram, this Shahinsha noticed during a conference that here was a young swami, very alert and dynamic, who could speak only English, and this Shahinsha thought that if only he were to learn a little bit of Hindi, he could stir and thrill the whole of North India. It seems he got hold of Gurudev, took him to his tent and said, "Come on, stay with me, I will teach you Hindi in two or three months, and then you can take the whole of North India by storm." A marvellous ideal, a beautiful carrot dangling in front of him. It seems Gurudev slipped out of the place late at night without telling Shahinsha, and afterwards he didn't even see him. There was no eagerness to acquire more talents in order to outshine somebody else - what for?

If people went to him in Swargashram, saying, "I would like to learn Sanskrit", "There is Tapovan Swamiji, please go and learn". Some young man comes to him and says, "I want to learn kundalini yoga", "There is Swami Yoganandaji, please go and learn from him." Even in Rishikesh he used to do this. You want to study Vedanta? Go to Krishnananda Swami. You want to study some asanas and pranayama? Vishnudevananda Swami. So he was really a director in the ashram. One who directs people to go to this room or that room. There was no desire in him to excel anyone else. All these are manifestations of

myself. When a person has gone beyond the ego-sense, you are himself. Why must I make a distinction between this person called Swami Sivananda and another person called Swami Tapovanandaji Maharaj? You can go to him. I am he. Soham. Incidentally I should mention that when the arati was being sung, "Jaya Jaya Arati Satgurunatha, Satgurunatha Sivananda," he also used to sing it! You are singing "Sivananda." Why must this ego-sense arise and identify this body and this mind with that name, and pride over this? He was quite satisfied, totally and permanently satisfied, and that satisfaction was never disturbed by whatever happened. "Having attained which, he longs for naught else." This definition given in the Bhagavad Gita is only fifty percent of it. The second half is a bit more difficult.

"Being rooted in which, the yogi is not disturbed inwardly even by the greatest calamity". One calamity that was almost constant was financial crisis. There used to be a financial crisis, in the best of days, at the rate of once a year and sometimes twice a year. Secretaries and auditors and accountants would go in a deputation and say, "Swamiji, we are broke!" "Ah, is that so! What can be closed? The kitchen can be closed. Why? Because we can beg for food in Rishikesh. We will do a little bit of work. Even the postal expenses can be eliminated, we won't send any parcels of free books hereafter. "But aren't you concerned that your life work is ruined?" That is not treated as a calamity. It is treated as another event in this procession of events which we call your life or the life of the ashram. It is as important or as unimportant as the greatest or most hilarious event. This is another event, its characteristics being that we are financially broke. So let's immediately take the necessary steps. We will close the free book despatching department. You don't have to lock the shelves containing books. People can help themselves. We are saving postage. If someone comes and finds that he likes that book, let him take it and go! Packing and postage are saved. Keep all the doors and windows open, let anything happen. And so the financial crisis passed away. If the financial crisis passed away, that's also alright! Yaminstito na dukhena. "Even in the worst of all

calamities the yogi remains unmoved." There was even a mischievous joy, as if he was eager to enjoy even that situation. It's disaster in your eyes, not in my eyes. Here is something funny, let us enjoy it.

I should like to describe two last incidents, one which threatened his life and one which almost threatened the life of the ashram. There was a swami, a brilliant man, exceptionally dynamic. And Gurudev had great confidence in him, and therefore he had been entrusted with all sorts of departments. He was the postmaster, the cashier, the treasurer, the secretary, he was everything. And in addition to all these dynamic activities he was also engaged in another dynamic activity which was revealed half an hour after he had suddenly left the ashram. There was no money in the ashram. No one knew how much he had embezzled, how much he had taken away, and how much he had sent to whom, where and how! No one knew anything. All that we knew was that there was no money in the ashram, the banks had overdrafts, and, since he was the postmaster, there had been some pilfering there also. Everything had gone. Then for once there was an ultraserious financial crisis, it was not merely an ordinary financial crisis. Then we were broke, here we started with a minus balance. Naturally the police had to be called, and all sorts of enquiries made, because the postal monies were also involved. But Gurudev was calm, smiling, laughing. "Abyaa, hum, that's wonderful, is that so," And whenever somebody went to him to complain about this man he would say, "He was a good worker, wonderful, a very able worker." This man had compiled two books and published them - Self-Realization and God-Realization. First class titles. And Gurudev kept those two books by his side throughout that period, so that if someone came complaining, "Oh, he was a brilliant man, he produced these two books!" It doesn't matter how much he stole or how thoroughly he robbed the ashram, nothing mattered, not even what happened to the reputation of the ashram, including its financial credit. Even the shopkeepers in Rishikesh said, "Please hereafter will you pay money before you buy your goods." Never mind all that.

Meantime a small miracle was going on. There were quite a number of visitors in the ashram, and everybody was getting

ready for a diet of nothing but roti and dal - but strangely, or not so strangely, everyday without knowing what had happened, someone came and said, "Today I would like to donate for a bandha, a feast. We were broke, completely, utterly broke, insolvent. And everyday we were having khir and sweets, not at the expense of the ashram. So for ten or fifteen days in succession we were having feasts. And this old man was sitting there and laughing. That was the beauty. Even then he was not moved at all, not bothered at all. They even said, "Shall we employ a C.I.D. man to trace this man?" and Gurudev said, "Ah, forget it, somehow we will make good the amount that he has stolen, forget it!"

Another incident was an attempt on his own life. This happened in 1950. There was no electricity, and the only illumination in the satsang was the little wicklamp burning at the altar and a hurricane lantern which used to be turned off and put away as soon as the reading part was over. In the bhajan hall, at the central entrance, just on top of the steps, Gurudev used to sit on one of those little mats. The reason why he sat there he described himself. "You know I am a diabetic and I've got loose bowels. I may want to get up and leave, or I may come a bit late to the satsang and I don't want to disturb anyone." Never once was he late and never once did he get up during the middle of the satsang to go to the bathroom or anything like that. So that was his seat. This happened on the eighth of January. Somebody had been waiting for him. Later we learnt that this man was waiting for him in the morning. Gurudev used to walk alone up the hill from his kutir. It was winter. And I believe this man was sitting on one of the hilltops ready to roll down a stone as Gurudev walked up. But that morning Gurudev missed coming up. The whole morning he was repeating, "I don't know what happened, I overslept today." He was repeating this the whole morning as if he had committed a great crime by not coming to attend the morning meditation in the bhajan hall. So he escaped. At night he would come and sit there. He had a big turban made of his own shawl, a black shawl, tied as a turban. And as soon as he came and sat down, he would take it off and put it by his side. That night he forgot. Thank God he

forgot. And this man had come into the bhajan hall, axe in hand. He aimed a blow right on his head, missed, and the handle hit the turban, so that the head didn't receive even the handle. The man realized that he hadn't hit Gurudev, so this time he was a bit nervous, and he lifted the axe again, but only hit a picture hanging above Gurudev's head. That gave another warning, and by the time he recovered he had been overpowered, and then the people in the bhajan hall knew that there had been an attempted assassination. Two swamis came running down. Some of us were working in the office, and this swami was so excited that he couldn't even convey the news properly. He wanted to run to the police station to get the police. Then two of us went up. Now this is the most important thing I want to bring home to you here. As we were coming up the hill, half-way there we heard, "Om sarvesam swasti bhavatu Om... The whole congregation was singing, "Sarvesam shaanti bhavatu." I said, "Swamiji is alright". If something had happen to Gurudev nobody would be there to say, "Sarvesaam swasti bhavatu". As we entered the bhajan hall he was very nicely chanting, "Om purnamadah..." Visualize yourself in such a situation. Even if you had escaped unhurt, even if you were young, your heart would still be palpitating, your voice wouldn't be steady. Yet there he was steadily continuing with the satsang, and there was not a trace of disturbance. We had brought the petrolmax lantern. People got hold of the would-be assassin and started hitting him, and it was Gurudev who saved him. "Don't beat him, don't beat him!" Later on Gurudev gave him a wonderful send-off, worshipping him with flowers and fruits. Here we saw two things together. One - the cosmic vision. In the Yoga Vasishtha there is a very specific mention of the enlightened person's behaviour. Someone comes to worship you and at the same time another man comes with a dagger, ready to kill you. Is your mind undisturbed by this as well as that? Then the ego is gone. There is no need, no desire to live longer, and there is no craving to die. Neither this nor that. That seems to be the simplest sign by which others can recognize an enlightened person. Whether even these meant anything to him or not I don't know, because I don't think Gurudev even referred to this incident later. To him it was something natural, there was nothing extraordinary about it to boast

about. It was nothing. It was immediately forgotten.

The egoless person does not even know his own egolessness, just as the sun does not know that it is a luminous body. Its luminosity is valuable only in contrast to other non-luminous, inert, dead bodies. When there is no contrast, there is no awareness of one's own glory, one's own uniqueness, of one's own saintliness, of one's own enlightened state, of one's own egoless state. Is there a mark? The mark is only discerned by one in whom ignorance still pervades. The enlightened one is enlightened, and there is nothing more.

SIVANANANDA YOGA

MAURITIUS - SEPTEMBER 1977

I

I thought during these few evenings we might take up one by one the four famous words of Swami Sivananda which have gone into our motto: "Serve, love, meditate, realize". I don't know if we understand what it involves, what it means. I heard somebody say the other day, "We don't believe in any worship, in any form of meditation and so on. There is only one worship, which is service, service of the sick and suffering, uplifting humanity. Our God lives in the sick and the poor." It's marvellous to hear. Very often the mind that hears this is a mind that is not interested in being uplifted. "I want to uplift the poor people." Who are you to uplift the poor people?" "I want to uplift the downtrodden", what about you? But when you hear it, "Oh, it's glorious". But what is hidden, is the subtle mischief that I feel that I am great enough, big enough to uplift others.

Recently I had a very interesting experience in San Francisco. There was someone there whom I call Kali. Kali does not mean a fearsome deity, but according to me, is a female spiritual aspirant who goes on collecting skull souvenirs. The male counterpart is Dattatreya who had 24 gurus.

This Kali is one who goes after every guru or every swami or everyone that comes along and collects a souvenir, you know, Kali is supposed to have a garland of skulls. And so she can point out, "This is Swami So-and-so, all these swamis I have met and all their instructions I have received, blessings I have received and so I am somebody superior to you. How many gurus do you have? Only three?" Eventually she was fortunate enough to meet someone who made her a swamini. So, flowing in robes, she came to see me one day. That swami who made her a swamini went back to India and she has lost touch with him, God knows why. Now, she has a very real and serious problem: 'That swami has made me a swamini, which means that I must have some following.' If you are a teacher you must have students, if you do not have students, you are not a teacher, even if you are qualified to be a teacher. So how do I become a swami if I do not have any followers? I pointed out to her that it is not necessary for all swamis to have followers. A guru must have disciples, a swami need not have anything. A swami is a fakir, I am a swami, I just walk around, that's all. "Ah," she said, "That's very good, alright, now I plan to go to India, and I'll spend 2 or 3 months there. Can you introduce me to some great person or ashram there where they train gurus, because I want to become a guru?"

Of course if I am a guru I can uplift everybody, I can spiritually elevate everybody and all that, but am I the right person for the job? I can elevate the downtrodden, I can serve the poor, I can serve the sick, heal the sick and all that. Am I qualified to do that? If you are not qualified to serve, you may end up in a very comic situation. A big man hired a servant who was so totally devoted to the master that one day when the master was sleeping and some insect was crawling on his cheek, he took up a big stone and smashed it on the master's face! My homoeopathic teacher used to say, "Sometimes we can treat people, serve people so wonderfully that not only the disease but even the patient disappears!" So first of all I must know if I am the right person to teach, to spiritually uplift and elevate and all that. And one should also know, what it is to serve.

The first is easily disposed of. I've never heard our Gurudev say, "I am a guru, I'm here to teach everybody, I'm here to save everybody, to redeem everybody." He never said so. And even when he seemed to teach, suddenly after a few moments his whole behaviour would change and he would say, "I've told you what I think, consider it, do what you like." And if it was a platform talk, he would invariably say, "This is my service, this is my worship, this is my prayer, I'm merely sharing." He was equally eager to sit and listen to others, to you and me, anybody. In the whole of India I've not seen one great swami who was as eager to listen as to teach, or probably more eager to listen than to teach. So this teacher mentality, the guru mentality he avoided almost completely and totally. I've lived with him and watched him from moment to moment. One could never find this guru business except on one occasion, when he gave sanyas diksha, then for a few moments he was like a blazing fire, and as soon as the initiation was over he once again became a grandfather. "What would you like, a cup of tea? You must be tired, have a cup of coffee," That was his attitude.

When it comes to service, we can readily see three words which represent what we are talking about. One is labour, the other is work, the third is service. The action is exactly the same. Whether you treat what you are doing as labour, or work, or service, the action is exactly the same; but there is a vital difference.

Labour is when you are forced to do something with all your heart and soul. I think we must change it to head and soul, not from heart to soul, but from head to soul you are rejecting it, rebelling against it, you don't want to do it, but you are forced to do it by all sorts of circumstances. You want to earn a living and you are made to do something which you hate to do. Or you love somebody and that somebody makes you do something. There's a split here. That is when people get into psychological difficulties, depression. And headache and all sorts of psychosomatic disorders set in.

I've never heard Gurudev mention that he had to do something or he was made to do anything. Whatever he did, he

enjoyed. And even when it was working or earning his livelihood, which he did in Malaya before he became a swami, even then he used to tell us that he was extraordinarily keen because he looked upon it as work, not labour. He got his salary and he got his income from the work no doubt, but in addition to that he did a lot more than he was expected to do, or he did what he expected to do, which was not officially expected of him. The more work he had, the more he threw himself into it. He used to tell all sorts of stories about the days when he was a doctor in Malaya. He was a doctor and his business was to treat patients, but then if the dispenser was absent, he did that work also, why not? And if the accountant was absent, he did that work also, and naturally when they saw that he was eager to take on any job that was there for him to do, they made it available. One day the accountant was sick and the other day the compounder was sick, and so it went on. So whatever he did, he enjoyed, because from whatever he had to do there was always something he could learn, either a skill or about himself, how much energy or vitality there is, how it could all be used, and while he was doing it he never rejected, never regretted, there was no tension within at all. "This is something I don't want to do, this is something I have to do," that was not there at all. Only once, long after he had become a swami, he said, "I didn't know I would have such a wonderful field of activity at this time of my life, otherwise I would have conserved my energies a bit more when I was a doctor in Malaya." It was because of the strenuous life he led in Malaya that the body fell an easy prey to illness, lumbago, rheumatism, diabetes and all that. So labour was something that was totally unknown to him. And if you are able to enter into the spirit of this, you'll probably see that he who does not regard anything as labour, enjoys his work. There is nothing the mind rejects, there is no grouse and there is no grumble. There is a delight in whatever I have to do. What I have to do, I love to do.

There is one little snag in it, we'll come back to it. "I love to do". Why? Is there a motivation? That might come and worry us later, but then that motivation is there whether we regard it as labour or work. What is work? Work is

something which we do. We do not particularly enjoy doing it, nor do we particularly suffer doing it. It's okay, I have to do it, I'll do it. That's called work. Most of us know this I think. When there is no inner rebellion, you function just doing what you have to do, but then there is the question of motivation. What makes me do it, why should I do it?

It is here that most social workers run into difficulties. You can do a lot of social work. It is not that social work is discouraged. Gurudev encouraged social work, but with this difference. While doing that I must also be aware of the motivation. The difference between work and service lies entirely in this motivation. The action is the same. What you are doing can be work or service depending upon the motivation. In the case of work there is always a motivation. "I'm doing this because..." This also was totally, completely absent in Gurudev and I believe that even when he was still a doctor, it did not matter at all what he got out of that work. He did what he had to do with great joy. One must be careful here. At that time he was not a swami, and if you pardon my saying so, probably he was not interested in this karma yoga and all that. It is not necessary that one should have a theoretical knowledge of karma yoga and the Bhagavad Gita in order to be able to do that. What Krishna taught Arjuna is common sense. And if my intelligence is awake I see this common sense point of view without having read your wonderful scriptures and so on. And if my intelligence is asleep, even though I go on listening to all this everyday, not a drop goes anywhere inside. If the intelligence is awake, it sees that every motivation leads to some difficulty, every hope inevitably leads to frustration, it must. An expectation must lead to disappointment. If it does not do so today, it is an accident. If what you expect, happened, it is a sheer coincidence. A man of awakened intelligence sees what is simple, what is totally clear. Of the first five attempts I succeeded once. I expected something to happen five times but it happened only once, four times there was failure. So what is closely, directly and intimately connected to the expectation? Failure, frustration, that's all I see. The intelligence that sees this, drops the expectation. When the expectation is dropped,

the frustration is also dropped. If I don't expect anything, there is no frustration. That is what Gurudev saw even when he was in Malaya. He used to work, he worked very hard from morning to night, expecting nothing. This is the second aspect of it. Can I work, can all my actions proceed without being motivated by expectation, by hope? Where there is no expectation there is no fear either. Where there is no hope there is no fear. "I hope that it will turn out that way." That statement, that feeling is invariably accompanied by, "I am afraid it may turn out to be different." Where there is no hope, there is no fear, there is no frustration. This is still work and in Malaya he was very enthusiastic in his work. Of course he was prosperous too, that goes without saying. That is another remarkable and wonderful and beautiful truth. He did not say, "Well, I have no motivation, I don't expect anything from you, and I'm doing this which is a bit of work." When the doctor or the nurse serves you in that fashion, you show your gratitude by giving a coconut or a couple of bananas or five rupees. Gurudev never refused it. Just as I do my job, my work, you must also do your work. If my work is to treat you as a doctor or as a nurse or as just a nobody, and if you wish to do something about it by showing your gratitude in cash or kind, well, you are free to do that. That was another extraordinary feature in Swami Sivananda. I've seen hundreds of swamis who wouldn't touch money, wouldn't accept a donation. He said no, if somebody gave him money he took it. In the pure spirit of sharing. If I am to do what I have to do with delight, with joy, then you can also do what you want to do equally with delight and joy. Once he said (which is an exact translation of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, I don't know if he quoted from there): "Don't ask, don't reject". "He is a true sanyasin who does not reject nor desire." Then you are free, instantly free, psychologically.

So even in Malaya when he worked as a doctor, he did his job with the greatest delight, avoiding all motivation, no motivation of amassing wealth, wealth comes without your running after it. Reputation comes without your running after it, if it has to come. If it doesn't have to come, it won't come. Without any of these motivations he was busy. There is

a verse in the Bhagavad Gita: "Yoga is skill in action, efficiency in action." Efficient action is possible only if your whole being is involved in that action, and it is not possible for you to be totally involved in that action, if your mind is split in at least two halves. You're thinking of the future, and now, hopes and expectations and fear create a future. It is when you hope that a future is born, if there is no hope there is no future. If there is no fear there is no future. When you create a future by projecting a hope or a fear, then your action is unskilled because you are not there. One small part of you is here doing the action, the rest of you is projected into the future, fearing, "I hope it turns out that way, I am afraid it might turn out the other way." If you are totally here, your action is perfect. If your whole being is here and now without any part of you being projected into the future, that action is total and therefore efficient.

I have heard that professionally Gurudev had no failure at all. Professionally absolutely no failure. Even though he didn't even complete his medical course. He succeeded by merely being totally there in every action, and that was his characteristic throughout his life. Whatever he did he did with his heart and soul completely, completely. Every action, whatever he did, was done totally, and that was because he never considered a future or linked his action to the past. The future came, the future must come. The future rolls along and as it reaches you it becomes the present. That is the present, it is called present because it is the gift of God, every moment is presented to you, and when it reaches you it becomes the present, a present from God, a present from time. So without bothering about the future, if you live and function whole heartedly, then every moment of your life becomes a delightful present, a precious present.

It was only after he became a swami that he evolved the other philosophy of service as service. We didn't discuss this aspect with him at all, but I have a feeling that he must have seen that whatever you do ultimately turns out to be a failure, in a manner of speaking. You can go on treating a sick man and patch up whatever holes he has, eventually the fellow dies, then

you begin to wonder, why did I have to do this and why does the man have to die? Then you say the whole thing was a waste. What have you done? Nothing. This must have hit him at sometime or another and it was then that Gurudev evolved this famous word "serve". It is not labour, it is not work, it is service. Service is always with humility, with love. How does this humility arise? What is humility and how does it arise? It is not a show, it is not a formula, but something which arises in your heart when you realise that it is not this person I am serving. I am not serving any personality, I'm not serving anybody. It is to the Indwelling Spirit that this service is directed. So there is no labour, there is no work, there is no hope, there is no reward, or hope for reward, but everything that I'm able to do, I consider already a blessing. It is not that I'm doing this in order to gain a blessing. The doing itself is a blessing. That is the very essence of this first word, serve, and it had to be seen to be believed. He was very fond of doing little physical services, and even then he always folded his palms and said, "Thank you for letting me do this." When he gave something, once again, "Thank you for receiving it." He was always grateful to the person who enabled him to do a little bit of service. I heard this expression a million times. "I'm grateful to you for giving me this opportunity to serve you." So to be able to serve, is itself a great blessing. When this attitude is found, not acquired, found in the heart, then that life itself becomes a blessing. How does one do that? By directly seeing, not thinking, that it is not the body that I am serving, it is not this somebody that I am serving, it is the Indwelling Spirit of God that I am serving, and then it is not I who am serving, it is the same Spirit of God that dwells in this body who serves the Spirit of God that dwells in that body. When this vision or realization is gained, then there is true humility - not till then. True humility is not possible till this vision is gained.

I don't know what idea or concept of God you have. God is. And therefore he is called Ishwara. God is infinite, or eternal. In essence it means that God is not something that can be reached or acquired. You have to lose yourself in God. You have to be absorbed, totally absorbed in God. "How do you get absorbed?" A question which was very beautifully answered by some children the other day. One girl said, "Obviously there are two to start with. But when one becomes part of the other, then one is absorbed." Can I similarly be totally absorbed in God? That is called love, that is called Bhakti. So all my actions must be directed towards God. God being not something that I can acquire as a gain, God being infinite, the relationship between me and God has to be one of my being absorbed in him. If my action or service has this as its goal, then it becomes yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, you can call it what you like. It is only if we bear this in mind that we can understand how Gurudev was able to live and function, work, serve, without expecting anything in return. My whole life is dedicated to God, not even God-Realization, and therefore the mind does not ask for a reward, not even to go to heaven. The mind does not ask for a return, because the goal suggested for this life, for this dedication, for this service, is God himself, who is here and now, everywhere, and I want to be absorbed in God.

So I want to be totally absorbed in God, but not by not doing. It is not possible. Not even for a single moment can you remain doing nothing. Doing nothing is a misnomer, a contradiction in terms. Doing is doing, doing means doing something. Even if I sit in the half lotus posture with eyes closed, that is doing something, and even if I do not talk to you, that is also doing something. So it is not possible for you to do nothing, and therefore let whatever you do be directed toward this goal, the goal which is here, right now, and that is to be absorbed in God. Then even the actions are directed towards this omnipresent Being. That is the beautiful vision that Krishna gives us in the Bhagavad Gita.

By worshipping that omnipresent infinite Being with every one of one's actions, man reaches perfection, and that is what I saw in Gurudev's life. Whatever he did had God as its goal,

not only its goal but also its source. Can I do anything at all in this world? Who am I to serve? Am I doing anything at all? I'm supposed to be sitting and talking here. But am I doing, am I talking, am I doing anything here? If so, what is the "I" that does it? If one inquires into that, one arrives at the understanding, that it is not me. It is some intelligence, some power, some energy, some shakti that does all this, and therefore if the feeling that I am doing something can be merged, offered, dedicated to God, then there is no feeling "I am doing this" and the opportunity is not given to the mind to produce the next phrase: "Because I want to gain so-and-so." "I am doing this in order that I may become famous, or to gain a material or psychological reward" - nothing. Because I am not doing this at all. The source of the action is God and the goal of the action is God. If this is not there, no service is meaningful, for it will necessarily be tainted by vanity on the one hand and seeking for reward on the other. Both of these must lead to frustration. If I go on thinking "I am doing this, I am so and so, I am somebody", when that action is made impossible, then I am frustrated.

This is something which I never saw in Gurudev. He was very active at one time, and when the body underwent the natural change of old age, there was no regret at all, there was no looking back. Instead, "This is what there is now." In common language, it is God's will that this is what must happen now, this is all that is possible. It is not "I" that does it, it is some other power that does it, and that power, that energy, that intelligence knows what should be done, how much, how far and in what manner. In our case it is the ego that keeps on pushing the body, prompting us, pushing the mind, and when that pushing is not possible, you get frustrated. Especially when you start thinking, "I used to do this, I used to do that." It is the "I" that used to do and is not able to do, or the "I" identifies itself with something which happened before thinking, "I did it". I did not do it, it happened! In that simple truth the yogi sees that the "I" is not the doer. Something made it happen then, something doesn't make it happen now, something makes something else happen now. From that he derives tremendous strength. That is how Gurudev

lived, he never looked back, he never bothered to compare his present state with a previous state. Why? Because he knew "I" is not the doer, the action springs from the same Chit Shakti, the divine power, the divine energy that is prompted by God-consciousness. That is what works, let it decide what has to be done. I shall neither be idle nor push myself, entertaining the notion that I am doing this, I will not do this, I will do only that.

In order to achieve this one has to have a total understanding of the divine or God. Gurudev therefore combined very effectively what are separately known as karma yoga and bhakti yoga. To him, serve meant love, love meant serve. So serve, love. Without love one cannot serve. Then it becomes labour, then it becomes work, if it is labour you are tortured within yourself, and if it is work, you are looking for a reward, and so asking for frustration. If it has to be service, it can only be based on love, otherwise it is not service and if there is love in your heart, you will serve. No force is necessary, no persuasion is necessary, love expresses itself spontaneously as service.

What is essential for that, is God-Realization, whether you want to practise karma yoga or bhakti yoga or whatever yoga you feel like, it is God-Realization that makes it possible. What is God-Realization? The direct understanding of the truth that God is real. God-Realization is not looking at the tip of the nose or between the eye-brows and seeing a vision. You can see a vision if you want, no harm. But God-Realization means the direct understanding in which there is not a shadow of doubt that God is real. At times we think there must be a God. We get some windfall or we think, "Ah yes, God is giving me this because he knows I deserve it". Or something goes wrong and we wonder how God can be so cruel. We believe in this God, occasionally, when it suits us. So the rest of the time God is not real, to us. Is it possible for us to live in such a way that God is real all the time? That not a shadow of doubt arises in the heart, not a cloud of doubt or vacillation passes over the mind and the intelligence. That is God-Realization. Whatever happens, can I know that this also is the will of God? Never mind

whether people call it pain or pleasure, happiness or unhappiness, success or failure, this too arises from God. That is what I saw in Gurudev. Whatever happened, he might or might not have said in so many words, "This is God's will", but we could see it because there was absolutely no resistance to it. A certain circumstance arose, and in that what had to be done happened. And what had to be done also happened because there was this total surrender. When there is direct understanding of the omnipresence of God, then there is immediate surrender, and that surrender is love. When you realise that God alone is, then the "I" is surrendered, that surrender is love, bhakti. In that love you will still function, you will still carry on, what has to be done has to be done because it is determined not by the mind but by God himself.

That was the beautiful life we witnessed in Gurudev. There was this love, there was this surrender, but as long as life continues in the body, the mind also functions related to this body. So a sage or saint has to live in such a way that there is this consciousness of the Omnipresence, the Infinite, even though the consciousness of the diversity is not lost. While you are in this body you are still related to this body, and it is no use bluffing, "I am the Infinite". You are not the Infinite. The Infinite is. All of us are little sparks of that Infinite. So there is this consciousness of all of us as well as of the Infinite. It's an extremely delicate subtle tightrope-walking. You must live and function in this world and yet you should not lose consciousness of the reality of God, the One in the many, the Imperishable in the perishable, the Infinite in finite objects. Can one keep this consciousness intact? That's the question, and that is the question I saw answered in Gurudev's life.

It is only in that heart there can be love, where you do not want to meddle with the other person. In his own ashram there were people who were Hatha Yogis, there were Vedantins, there were meditators, there were mounis who wouldn't even talk, there were dynamic workers, all sorts of people, smokers, thieves too. And from his point of view they were all manifestations of the same being. In and through them it was God who was

playing all sorts of different roles. That was the most beautiful way of living, seeing God in all, the All and the God within. The All is not neglected, so that when he saw a sick person, he saw a sick person and God indwelling. Can I sustain this dual consciousness, see the unity without pretending that I do not see the diversity, the unity being the divine and the diversity being the manifestation, the appearance, the forms? Only then, is it possible for a person truly, sincerely, without hypocrisy, to love all. People of all religions. I don't think he even as much as recognized that there were different religions. He recognized of course that people worship in different ways. There was no condition, if you do this, I will love you. That's not love. That's a bargain, that's some kind of business, this I never saw in Swami Sivananda. He never insisted that his disciples should all be his disciples only. Even if you were a sanyasi disciple of his, and suddenly said, "I want to go and learn from that master," he would say, "Go, please go."

That is the beauty of love. There is no argument, there is no condition at all, because love or God-Realization or bhakti or service is possible only if one is dead within oneself, only if the I, the ego is dead. So the other side of love is death. Kill this little "I", die to live. If I do not die to this little self, to this conditioned existence, to this feeling, "I am this body", then there is no love, there is no service and there is no God-Realization. Only he who is able to see God in all, and all in God, lives in God, in God-Realization. In order to make this God-Realization real, Gurudev exemplified in his own life bhakti in all its aspects.

You might gather the impression, that his was a completely inner spiritual or intellectual affair, it was not. He was the most inveterate idol-worshipper I have seen among the great saints. It was both his exercise as well as his example, but it was not worshipping the idol as idol. How do I know what it feels to be in the presence of God? What does it mean when I say God is real? If I am able to see God in this image of God, then it is possible for me to experience being in the

presence of God. It is not idol-worship as an end in itself, but idol-worship as part of this total scheme of experiencing the presence of God. Is it possible for me to experience the presence of God here? God being omnipresent is here also. If I can gain that experience here, then it is possible for me to use that as a touchstone to see whether I can also have the same experience in the person I am serving. If I stand in front of that statue of Venkateswara, and fold my palms and feel the presence of the divine there, and then I greet Mataji, I can see, Aha! the same feeling is not there. So in order to be sincere in this adventure of God-Realization, I learn to feel the presence of God in and through something. So Gurudev was very particular about it. There was not a single morning when he did not perform his own little worship in his own little shrine in his room. It is then that one can really and truly ensure that the proper attitude is preserved in all one's dealings, otherwise the little service that we may render each other will degenerate into personal social work, I scratch your back and you scratch mine. Then attachment develops. He loved all, which means he loved no one in particular. It was the Cosmic Being, the realization of the Cosmic Being that flowed from him, in him as love. That love is possible in us only if we remember God and remember death at the same time. If I am able to do this, the self dies and God is realized. He was also fond of the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna gives a list of special manifestations. He used to do it himself, coming out of his kutir he looked at the Ganges: "I am the Ganga among rivers," and then he looked at the Himalayas: "Among stable objects, I am the Himalayas," and then he looked at the sun: "I am the sun." He also composed a lovely vibhuti yoga song in which he used to sing, "I am the taste of coffee in coffee." If you are drinking coffee, know that the taste of coffee itself is God. When you smell jasmine, "Ah, this is divine." When you look at a beautiful flower, the beauty in that flower is divine. In this manner he extended the vibhuti yoga to cover everything, whatever he saw, whatever he experienced everyday, whatever he came into contact with, every moment. Thus, one should develop this narayana bhav, seeing God in all, without neglecting anything, any form

of worship. When the mind is tempted to abandon one form of worship, the thing that says, "I don't want ritualistic worship" is still the ego. And as long as the ego is so active and vital, God-Consciousness is impossible, Cosmic Consciousness is bluff. That which says, "Why should I do this ritual? I've gone beyond this," will inevitably come up with other suggestions: "Why should I indulge in this kind of service? I like some other kind of service." "I like, I don't like". That is what we are supposed to abandon. It is this "I like" and "I don't like" that should be abandoned, because they spring from the I, from the ego, and as long as the ego exists, these likes and dislikes will continue, and when the likes and dislikes have gone, the ego will disappear, has disappeared. All these go together, come together, rise together, fall together. When the ego is totally absorbed in the divine, only then is service possible. Service implies love, the love is of all, and the many. God and all beings, all beings in God and God in all beings.

III

The third word that formed the foundation of Gurudev's teachings is "meditate" and it had a completely different meaning for him. Meditation is not something which can be or should be practised as an exercise, only as an exercise, for an hour in the morning or half an hour in the evening, though he did not exclude such practices, just as, in order to realize the omnipresence of God, he also worshipped an image. In order to integrate meditation in life he also practised some meditation as an exercise, but that is not the whole thing.. I may engage myself in an exercise called meditation occasionally, but to call that meditation is defective. A soldier may have to train himself by hooting at a sandbag, but that is not a war, war comes later, the real test comes later. This meditation must be the spirit in which I live. Meditation which is unrelated to life is useless. Meditation that is related to life becomes the vital part of life, just as the heart as long as it functions, keeps the

entire body going, all the systems go because the heart is functioning. If the meditation is correct then life must flow on smoothly. If there is some hitch in your life, that means your meditation is wrong. In other words, meditation must become one with life, or life must become meditation. If your total life becomes meditation, then there is absolutely no scope for a problem to arise. You regret having done something later only because you were not meditating when you did something. You were not aware, you were not conscious. So a life which is filled with this meditation is what Gurudev called divine life, when the divine forms an integral part of life, when there is no distinction between divine and living, when living becomes divine, when the divine is realized in and through life.

How can I meditate while at the same time living a full life, without regarding meditation as something outside of life and without allowing life to be lived haphazardly, blindly, foolishly? Once again we go back to the words of the Gita: "He who sees Me or God in all and he who sees all in God, is forever active, but does not get lost in that action." That is, the action is not blind action, or motivated action, selfish action. Selfish action assumes the existence of a thing called self. This selfishness and the inevitable motivation arise when consciousness is not alert. Such an action is bound to run into difficulties. What happens if I don't gain what I wish to gain? What happens if the self that assumes that I am sitting and talking is hurt by someone making an unpleasant remark? So as long as this self, this I, is allowed to rise, and the self is allowed to function in an assumed relationship, with a motivation, it is bound to run into difficulties. The awakened intelligence on the other hand does not solve your problems; it avoids problems, it doesn't allow the problem to arise. (Incidentally, if a problem has arisen, the best thing is to let it run its course and get out, not pay any attention to it.)

So in Gurudev's case, meditation was life itself, not even part of life. He also insisted on what we call the practice of meditation, and there again he had a fairly simple approach to it. When he asked people to meditate, it was to repeat a mantra, nothing more. I think there is a marvellous secret in it. I

think we all know of any number of techniques of meditation, self enquiry, transcendental meditation, Tantric meditation, Buddhist meditation, Tibetan meditation, all sorts of things. Many of these are born of the mind. It is the mind that creates these techniques, and when the mind creates a technique, it becomes a thought. I can sit here and visualize a great big mandala, and think about all those different features in the mandala, it's a good thing. My mind is kept busy. But it is not meditation because you are merely thinking, the mind roams in a field created by itself. After one hour you get up and walk out, and you are quite calm and peaceful, and happy. Probably your thoughts started wandering, and it's quite possible that some stray thought entered into the field of your awareness, and you think it was a psychic or inspirational experience, which is nothing but the attention running off at a tangent. Your mind is occupied, but you still don't know what the mind is, and there is no meditation. Such a meditation is useless, unrelated to life. Whereas when Gurudev said, "Sit and repeat a mantra, do japa," he insisted that you must be aware that you are repeating the mantra, otherwise you may be sleeping. So I'm sitting alone repeating this mantra, and the very fact that I am aware that I'm repeating the mantra ensures concentration. The attention is totally focused on the mantra. So far as Gurudev was concerned that was enough. That is all you and I can really do. The rest has to happen. If I am to be sure that I am repeating the mantra, my attention should be completely focused on it. This is the exercise.

Now, at some time or other the question must arise - the mind should not think that question, it must arise - "Where does this happen? Where am I hearing the sound? What is this sound? Or, who is repeating this mantra?" That must come in its own time. I cannot start asking myself this question, that looks funny. When you are asking, it is the mind that is asking the mind itself who is repeating the mantra. "I am repeating the mantra." "Who are you?" "I am Swami Venkatesananda." The whole question is absurd! It takes you nowhere. There must be total attention, and in total attention, these questions appear spontaneously.

That is what Gurudev was concerned with, but it is only an exercise. He insisted that even during your daily activity this mantra should go on as a background of thought. Build the mantra in such a way that it goes on as a background of thought whatever you are doing. That seems almost to contradict his own teaching that your whole mind must be concentrated on the mantra or upon what you are doing. But it is not so. You are probably familiar with this when you are doing something like driving a car or walking or doing something which you know very well how to do. If you watch your mind at that time, is the whole of your mind occupied in what you are doing? Never. While you are doing this the attention is scattered in a thousand directions. So building the mantra as a background of thought restricts this dissipation of mental energy. Instead of these thousand things you think of just this one thing, the mantra. The mantra goes on as a background and the action goes on. If you become an expert in that, then suddenly you become aware of the one and the many. The one being the background of thought, the mantra, and the many being all the different actions, the different thoughts and so on that we engage ourselves in. The "I" has gone, because I was repeating the mantra and the mantra took over, became real. The mantra shakti has been awakened, so that the mantra shakti has become the "me", the "me" has become the mantra shakti, and so this mantra shakti is watching the thousand actions that are taking place. That's it.

This cannot be brought about by desiring, willing, or working towards it, it has to happen. By building this background of thought, the scattering of attention is avoided and the energy is all completely concentrated in this mantra which forms the witness, as it were, of the activities of the body and mind; and therefore there is no distraction at all, you become very efficient. It is not as though you are absent-minded. Very often people mistake absent-mindedness for what Gurudev was teaching, that is, you sit and you do something, and you make a mess of everything and say, "You know, I was absorbed in saying the mantra mentally." A person who is absorbed in the mantra mentally is terribly efficient. Why? Because the mantra, this background of thought, prevents the

attention being scattered, the energy being dissipated, and therefore there is no absent-mindedness there. It is not I who is sitting and talking, the mantra chaitanya is there alert, that is, the consciousness is alert, and that consciousness over-sees all the thoughts and actions that proceed. That was the meditation that Gurudev taught. Such training made it almost unnecessary to practise a thing called meditation. It is not something apart from life, it is a part of life. (It is life) So that for a moment it looks as though you are standing at the threshold between the one and the many, between God and the world which is his own manifestation. And it is there at the threshold that you suddenly realise: this is one, this is many, but they are the same.

One who is practising this is undistracted. Gurudev had a very special expression called battlefield pratyahara. Pratyahara is when your attention is totally abstracted or pulled away from the external world and then focused on the object of meditation. Pratyahara is one of the limbs of raja yoga: ashtanga yoga. And it is usual to suggest that you must go away and seclude yourself in a cave or somewhere and shut off all your senses, withdraw the senses from the objects as a preliminary to the practice of meditation. That's not necessary. It is possible to sit in the most crowded area and let the mind turn its attention upon itself, and this background of thought, the mantra, will do it. If it is practised properly, the mantra enables one at a moment's notice to withdraw the total attention from dissipation, from being scattered on a thousand things, and to have the attention completely and totally focused upon whatever you choose. And since this attention or intelligence is ever alert, it does not allow you, or the doer of action or the thinker of thought, to do anything which you will regret later. It is there, luminous, bright, awake, alert, and in that awakened alert intelligence, error is not possible, shadow is not possible. Shadow does not fall on the sun. This background of thought, this meditative mind being more brilliant than the sun, does not allow a shadow to form on it, and therefore that life is an enlightened life. This was the extremely simple form of meditation that Gurudev lived and taught.

Is it possible for me to assume that I have built this background of thought and I am an expert? It's possible for us to bluff ourselves, because it seems to function, and then we think, "Of course I'm very calm and alert," because in order to observe the one and the many at the same time, the attention has to be very tranquil. Only a calm mind can pay total attention. And it is possible for us when we are training in this to think, we have reached the meditative mind. Then some disturbance arises in life, and you're carried away, you're gone. How did I get into this mess? When you thought the observing attention was still and calm, it only meant that there were no serious problems in your life. You only had a little candle which is alright when there is no wind, but when that little candle was confronted by a little bit of wind, it was blown out and the alertness disappeared. It was for this purpose Gurudev insisted that even though you think you have reached the other shore, why not sit and meditate for a little bit in the morning? What is wrong with sitting down for a little meditation morning and evening, treating yourself as a student of meditation, making sure that even though the candle may be a small one, even that little candle is kindled and bright? And therefore once again he was extremely regular in this morning and evening meditation.

Apart from that, he had another remarkable exercise to sustain this meditative mind. When he was engaged in some kind of activity, once in a while he would suspend that action. This is what most of us do not do. Whatever be the work you are engaged in, it is always possible to suspend that work for a few moments now and then and regain contact with that background of thought. The immediate benefit is that pressure doesn't build up, and if the activity you are engaged in is likely to cause conflict between you and somebody else, there is a chance for you to break it. That is possible in our life, if we again cultivate the habit of pulling the attention back into the background of thought every now and then. Apart from all this, whenever he re-entered his kutir, always, he used to pace up and down for a few moments on the veranda chanting, "Om," and we who might be with him, we suddenly found it strange. He was talking to us, joking with us, teaching us or teasing us and then suddenly he was gone, he was somewhere else. That was how Gurudev

transformed life into meditation, and that was his version of meditation, which is meditation in action, meditation in daily life.

IV

The last of the four words that comprised the motto which Gurudev gave us is the word "realize". To realize what? To realize means to make something real. One cannot make the unreal real, that is not possible, and it is not necessary to make the real real. The real is already real. What does this "realize" mean, then? It really and truly means the quest of the real, seeking the truth all the time. Are we aware of the truth? We are usually not. We are aware only of what we think is the truth, which is an opinion. That is where Gurudev's divine life begins.

Satyam, or the discipline of truth, is more than merely saying what you think is true. There was a swami in Rishikesh, whatever he felt, and whenever he felt like it, he said. If he thought I was a fool, he said it. That is not being truthful, that is being rude. A person who is devoted to truth, on the otherhand, would hesitate to say such a thing, because if the expression "You are an idiot", arises in his heart, he immediately sees that it is only an opinion, his opinion. Is it true? It may be true, I'm not saying it is not true, but the true seeker after truth does not blurt it out. He does not even say, "I think you are an idiot. That's what I think, what have you got to do with it? It doesn't concern you at all. It's my own thought." Who is an idiot? Something within me is an idiot. So first and foremost I never heard Gurudev express an adverse opinion about anybody. Why? I am looking for the truth. There is a feeling in me now that you are a fool. It is a feeling, it is not truth, it is momentary, so it is not worth expressing. The first and foremost discipline he taught us was, "Don't express an adverse opinion. Glorify, glorify, glorify everybody." Why? Because eventually you learn from the scriptures that man is made in the image of God,

so there is no harm in glorifying everybody. So, when it comes to expressing an adverse opinion about somebody, hold your tongue. This is one of the most fundamental, vital and important disciplines of truth that Gurudev practised and realized.

To realize: to be constantly in quest of truth. And to distinguish truth from opinion, to note that this is an opinion and not truth. A mind that is trained to distinguish the true from the false. This appears to be something, but what is the reality, what is the substance? A mind that constantly seeks the reality in life is not affected by the appearance. It does not have to reject the appearance, it is unaffected by the appearance. You cannot reject the appearance first. What you see with your physical eyes is the appearance, what the mind sees psychologically is a concept. You cannot look at me with those physical eyes without at the same time seeing the physical form, and with your mind without a concept of the name and form arising in your mind. That is not possible. But what is the problem here? The problem is a confusion. Though this is merely a form, you think it is the truth. Though this is merely a concept arising in your mind, you think it is true. It is that confusion which creates all the problems in our life. The reality does not cause any problem whatsoever. Nor does the unreality cause any problem, because the unreal doesn't exist. What does not exist, how does it create a problem? In the mind there is a confusion, and if this confusion can be resolved, that is, if the form is seen to be the form, that's it. If the form is realized as the form, if the concept is realized as the concept, if the opinion is realized as an opinion, that that is what it is in reality, then it doesn't affect you at all. You are able to live in this world without being confused by it. I'm still looking for the truth, but I see that this is an appearance. I'm still looking for the truth, I see that this is an opinion.

When it comes to what people say and what people said, this is where you really come to grips with this problem. Please don't forget that Gurudev was also the head of an enormous ashram, and he himself used to say it was a world in

miniature. There were all sorts of people there. Among his own disciples were people of divergent views, many different characteristics, many different qualities, many different views and approaches. I wanted to say that in spite of this diversity they all had one thing in common, devotion to Gurudev. Even that, shamefully, was not perfectly true. So you cannot even say that it was their devotion to Gurudev that held them together, it was his devotion to them that held them together, his totally indiscriminate love. That love is again born of the manifestation of this relentless quest of truth. Someone walks in and says, "I want to realize God. Please help me." What is your reaction? "Show me your credentials! How do I know that you are a true seeker after truth?" What is it that says so? Suspicion. I think or I feel. It may not be the truth, and so judgment was instantly suspended. Gurudev never judged because judgment arises from your opinion; if it is based on truth, truth must reveal itself. Truth does not require an advocate. It is its own evidence, light does not need another lamp to illumine it, it is its own light. So truth being its own light, my opinion need not come into this problem at all. Truth does not create a problem. It is when falsehood is mistaken for truth, in psychological confusion that a problem arises in life.

It is common practice in Rishikesh to greet one another with, "Om namo narayanaya." It's a holy expression, it means "I greet the God in you." Even in Rishikesh you can find people greeting each other in this way without meaning a thing. When Gurudev said "Om namo narayanaya," you could see from his face he was looking within. Is it true what you are saying? Your lips are saying, "I greet God in you." Is it true? Is that how you feel now?

You offer flowers at the feet of Gurudev's statue or Venkateswara's statue there. Luckily the statues are made of gold and bronze - anything else would break! I've never seen Gurudev do that. Why? "I'm not worshipping this bronze, I'm not worshipping that stone, I'm worshipping the Lord who is present here. And when I offer a flower at the feet of the Lord, am I sincere, am I seeing the Lord here or not?" When he offered a flower at the feet of Krishna in the ashram temple, it was as though he saw someone sitting there and very gently placed a

flower at his feet. It was the realization. I am looking for the truth. I'm telling myself, "I am worshipping God here." That must be true, that must be realized.

cally, he did meaningfully. He was looking for the truth. He was not examining the stone image to see if it was truly God or not. When I approach this statue with a flower in hand, I do so because I feel the presence of the divine. And if that can be made real, if truth can be infused into that feeling, then it becomes truth.

He was also fond of satsanga, because it is exalted as one of the gatekeepers to moksha, liberation, in the Yoga Vasishtha. Satsanga and vichara, these two are very powerful aids to atma-jnana, self knowledge, or liberation. And the satsang that we are following here is about the same pattern that Gurudev established in the 1940's. Why is this necessary? In satsanga one is reminded by the study of these scriptures of the reality as it was experienced by sages. It's obviously not my experience. These scriptures are pointers to truth, or at least to the probability that this is true. You hear an Upanishadic dictum, "I am atma brahma", "All this is the Supreme Being himself," or "All this is consciousness," "Consciousness is the Self." These are words, and you cannot practise these teachings. You cannot apply these teachings to your daily life, because they are not cosmetic. You merely hear these teachings, and that is what Gurudev used to do and encourage others to do. You sit there and meditate rather than just listen to it. Keep your whole being open, not only the ears. Let the expressed truth, which is the experience of others, enter the ears and be imprinted on your heart. This is Gurudev's own favourite expression, "The Upanishad must come from your heart." That's why "hear" and "heart" are very similar in spelling: it is the heart that hears. You hear it with your heart, and then, when the heart becomes saturated with this truth, your awareness, which is in search of it, experiments with this truth, discovers this truth, and becomes the truth. So then the truth that was enshrined in the scriptures springs from your own heart, becomes the truth of your own life, and living truth. When this Upanishadic truth pours from your own heart, not even from your experience, but from your heart, that's it, that's the only thing which can be

said, and that is the only thing that he said. Then you find that you become, you are the living truth. You started out in quest of truth, as if this truth was there and I'm here, seeking it. Then at another stage, you are the living truth. The quest has come full circle, and there is complete and utter silence. There is no seeking anymore, but there is no problem either. The unreality doesn't exist, or the unreality doesn't have any glamour for you to be tempted or distracted.

This is the realization that he placed before us, and this realization demands a completely still mind. It is only the still mind that can see the one and the many, the substance and the appearance, without being confused. It is only the still mind that is able to perceive the world within, the world of ideas, and the world in which the body moves, without confusing one for the other. And it is the mind which is ablaze with this quest for truth that can burn up every little bit of confusion as it arises. The opinion that wishes to usurp the place of truth is burnt, immediately, instantly. Opinion is seen as opinion. It is that mind which is capable of merging in cosmic consciousness.

I've pointed out also that Gurudev made no distinction between his own disciple and someone else's disciple. To him, in the ashram all were swamis, whether they wore orange robes, or white robes, or no robes. Whenever he spoke to someone he would always fold his palms very humbly, because, "I am speaking to a manifest divinity". Not words but action. When you gave him something he very rarely used the words "thank you" except when it came to some foreigners. But in his look you could see gratitude. And when he gave, again, there was this same gratitude on his face. The distinctions disappear between the giver and the receiver, between man and woman, between one disciple and another disciple, between my ashram and someone else's ashram. Once he visited Swargashram and they received him very nicely. He sat there and started giving instructions to them and to all of us. For about an hour it looked as if Swargashram was his, and it didn't matter whether the other ashram existed or not.

I never saw a distinction made by him. These distinctions

are opinions, conventions, and may be necessary. He was the President of the Divine Life Society, of course. That is a matter of convention, that is an administrative necessity, it may be needed, but it is not the truth. The truth is, he and I are one. The truth is, this ashram and that ashram are one. Again we saw it during the All-India Tour. He became one with the masses of people who came to listen to him. At any of those thousand places where he addressed huge gatherings, he could have collapsed and died. Never mind. That was no problem, they and I are one, they are my gods, they are living divinity, I am surrounded by this Cosmic Being. There is no life, there is no death. It comes in practice, it comes naturally. It is not as though Gurudev sat there and said, "These are the people whom I have to address today. Well, according to the Upanishads they are manifestations of the Cosmic Being." All this is mental gymnastics. He was there and there it was the truth. And to such an extent that he could spontaneously look upon someone who came to kill him also as a manifestation of god and fold his palms. It happened on January 8th, 1950. Somebody tried to hit him with an axe and kill him, when he was sitting in the dark in the bhajan hall, and nothing happened. Two of us were working in the office, when a swami came flying from the bhajan hall, terribly excited and worried, and we picked up our lantern and walked up the hill. And as we were half way up the hill we heard, "Om sarvesham..." Then I knew that Swamiji was alright because nobody else could have the presence of mind and the calmness in such a situation to go on doing the shanti mantra. And when we arrived, he was quite calm. And he could worship that man. The unreal ceases to be confused with the real. Here is a man, man is what I see. They say he came to attack me and kill me; that's only an opinion, not truth. But what is truth? Whatever is, is truth.

Once he even jokingly remarked, "I may have had visions of rishis and maharishis, and even of divinities while practising meditation in Swargashram, but all that is still in the realm of duality. I see the maharshi, I experience the presence of God; I experience the other." Is that a valid experience or not? Maybe. It may be a valid experience. But what

is maybe is not truth. Because there is still the experienter, the subject who seems to stand aside. There is still a division, and where there is a division, there is also confusion. Gurudev had such experiences. He didn't give them as much value as truth, becoming the living truth within himself, truth possessing him, being absorbed in truth, so that the truth lives for ever and ever. That was Gurudev's teaching concerning "realize", and it is because this was his realization that we feel that he is here and in our heart everywhere. We feel that he is here, and it is up to us to realize his presence.

YOGA VASISTHA

MAURITIUS - NOVEMBER 1977

I

We are reading and listening to the Yoga Vasistha everyday, and if you pay some attention to it you realize that it is not merely a scriptural text that has an intellectual value. If you try to understand it with your intellect or your mind, you will either fail to grasp it, or twist its meaning. It doesn't seem to make any sense at all, in some places it sounds illogical or absurd. In any case it doesn't make any sense; it seems to make sense in one place and then you go on reading it, and suddenly all sense is lost, you're back at square one. And if you put that and this together, you suffer from what is called confusion. So it is not something which can be understood intellectually, nor is it meant to promote the comfort of man. At least one person has tried to extract a cogent philosophy from it, but if one honestly listens to it, with one's heart, it can easily be seen that it has a philosophy which is not a philosophy according to the usual definition of the word. It is not something which can be put into a framework; so any system of philosophy that has a methodology or framework must fail to grasp it. Or it must declare that this is not a philosophical text, as indeed it's not.

The Yoga Vasistha is however meant to deal with something fundamental which we have turned into a problem. It is not a fundamental problem - life is not a problem at all. It is something fundamental, which we have somehow turned into a problem. How does one deal with that? If you have made your own life a problem, and it bothers you one way or the other, then the Yoga Vasistha can help you straighten it out, provided you don't try to understand everything with your intellect. If you apply your intellect you are lost.

As a matter of fact if you apply your intellect, you'll find you're lost all the way. I'll give you a very simple exercise. You have one block. Take a number of blocks and put them all in a line so that you have only about eight inches of width, you are making a footpath about eight inches wide. You can walk on it without any anxiety, without any trouble. You can also walk on this terrace, because that is also eight inches wide. If it is on the ground you are able to walk along an eight inch wide footpath without missing one step. When you walk on this terrace you feel a bit wobbly, but you can still do it. If, however, you walk on the other side of the terrace overlooking the ravine, it is different. And if the same thing happens to be over the ravine itself, that's quite different. Intellectually there is absolutely no explanation. I'm able to walk on this thing without any problem. Why should it become a problem in the other case? So this problem cannot be understood by the intellect, for it is created by something else, heaven knows what it is, and the intellect cannot solve it, the intellect can only make it worse. Probably if the whole place is dark, absolutely dark except that footpath, perhaps we might be able to walk. That is, if the mind or the intellect does not conjure up all sorts of possible dangers, that I may slip, perhaps we may be able to walk along that foot path in the sky without panicking. So wherever the intellect is applied it only creates a problem and it does not solve any problem. Here is the solution to the problem and therefore it cannot be grasped by the intellect.

What is the background story? For some unknown reason this is also attributed to Rama and the guru Vasistha, and for that purpose an incident from the Ramayana is taken over in its

entirety. We don't want to discuss that. The whole thing is said to have taken place at that point when Rama's father Dasaratha sends for him, for some mission. And Rama's attendant complains to the king that the prince went on a pilgrimage and when he returned from the pilgrimage his mood had changed. He's not interested in life, he eats and he sleeps mechanically, in psychological language he is depressed. When at the king's insistence Rama finally comes, the king, Vasistha, all the sages in the court ask, "Rama, what's wrong with you? Why are you like this?" But Rama only asks in his turn, "What is there in this life which I can be happy about?" And the first section, called Vairagya Prakaranam, is Rama's teaching. He says, "I think of life, it's passing, everything is changing. We're here now and I see death. Whatever you do with this body, it is going to die. And even before then, look at the various stages of life: the baby is at the mercy of other people. It's all the time crying, crying seems to be the one pastime and mission of a baby. When you look at that baby you feel miserable. Poor thing. That poor thing grows up a little bit, and then it plays, it falls, it breaks its bones, fracture, injury, compensation insurance. Alright, we spend a few more years, then we become a young man and the young man is not at peace either, he's not happy either. He's in search of happiness, he wants a young woman, the first prerequisite for happiness. So chasing after each other is not happiness, it's unhappiness. If he's happy, he sits down and enjoys himself. He's not happy and therefore he's looking for happiness. So that part of life is spent chasing something or other. He's miserable, miserable when he's chasing something, miserable when he gets something, miserable when he loses something. Then he becomes an adult: a wife, children, the very thing that he sought to make him happy makes him unhappy now, more and more unhappy. Wife and children are now regarded as burdens, as a responsibility, as trouble. Then old age, once again dependency on other people, being mocked at by other people, sickness, senility, stupidity. And as the man grows older he says, "Ah this is a nuisance, let me die," but when death comes he doesn't want it! It's crazy, isn't it! So Rama says, there doesn't seem to be any sense in life,

there doesn't seem to be any happiness in life. There doesn't seem to be any meaning in life. Then wealth: it is misery acquiring it, it is misery protecting it, it is misery when it is lost. And then he says, we go on saying I, I, I, I, the ego. One wants to promote that ego, yes? And the stronger the ego becomes, the more difficult to satisfy it, the more it demands."

I can see it from my own life. When I was one of the two hundred swamis in Sivananda's ashram, I didn't bother at all, nothing mattered. I didn't have to play to the gallery, I didn't have to satisfy anybody's expectations, I could lead my own life. I could sleep when I wanted to, get up when I wanted to, eat what I wanted, drink what I wanted, walk about naked if I wanted, anything. We could all do what we liked. Now that the ego has become big, you're a big swami, it becomes a greater nuisance. It seems to rule. Once you have built up your personality, that personality begins to rule. Once you have cultivated some habit, the habit begins to rule. So unhappiness there also. Everything in the world, everything concerned with life is tainted with unhappiness, and so Rama asks, "What shall I be happy about?" What do you want me to smile about, there is nothing in the world to smile about. Misery, misery, misery, the whole of life is tainted with misery.

And so Rama's attendant describes for the king the symptoms of Rama's behaviour and depression. Rama, he says, is in that state where he is not a complete moron, where he is not totally stupid, nor is he enlightened. In fact, it is only the moron and the enlightened man who have no problems. If I'm absolutely stupid, there is absolutely no problem. If I'm enlightened, there is no problem. It's in between that we create problems. When you read Rama's discourse it makes perfect sense. But where does it lead one to? It leads one into a state of depression, it leads one to withdrawal from the stream of life, not to enlightenment. Not surprisingly, Rama is perpetually moaning. You're miserable; you are miserable concerning your own life, other people's lives, the world in general. Only one thing is omitted here. Am I helping solve this problem by going into a depression: Life in the

world is miserable. There is war here, and there are riots there, there is killing there, there is repression here, there is suppression here, there is hunger there. This is a simple statement of fact. But, by becoming depressed over it, are you solving the problem? No.

What must I do in order to solve the problem? Where is it? Where is the problem? The problem is in me. So one should look within, look where the problem is (look within is an absurd expression) and remove it there. Why did the intellect create it? Because it was unaware of the truth. Because it was unaware of the truth it saw a problem in a set of facts. It is a fact that everyone who is born undergoes childhood, youth, maturity, old age and death, this is obvious. It is the intellect that creates a problem, there is no problem. If you look at those trees, they don't cry, they don't grumble, they germinate, they sprout, they become a little plant, they become a big tree, they grow old and die. It is the intellect that, because of its ignorance, because it is not facing the truth, creates a problem in the simple set of events called life. There is no problem in life. People are born, people live, people die. That's no problem at all. And when there is pain in the abdomen, the eyes water and the throat cries. When there is some pain here, (even "pain" is a word) something is happening here, and when that something happens, the eyes begin to water, the throat starts uttering some funny sounds, that's all, there's no problem. But something else turns it into a problem. So is there a way of realizing the truth, that is, not only trying to understand the truth, but make the truth more real than the opinion entertained by the intellect? The intellect cannot see the truth, the intellect can only perceive an idea, or opinion. So can the truth be realized? When we say, "Can the truth be realized?" we are not saying, "Can the mind understand it? Can the ego appreciate it?" No. Can I realize the truth? No. Can the truth be realized? The truth is there already, but there is something which veils it: the intellect; and therefore the truth, even though it is true, is not real. When truth becomes real, nothing undergoes any change, except that what the intellect had turned into a problem, ceases to be a problem. If you come back to the little example I gave you: there is some sensation here which

is called pain, and the swami's eyes begin to water and the throat begins to utter some funny sound, you are seeing it and you are moaning, "Oh, my God." When the truth is realized instead of doing all that, you'll probably go and get a doctor or an ambulance, and get busy, doing something about it - without describing it, without getting worried about it. Here is something, something is happening, and it demands an action. There is instant, spontaneous and right action when the truth is realized. When the truth is not realized, you are going to get anxious. When the truth is not realized, the only thing that is absent is right action, everything else happens. That's the difference. When you realize the truth, the stomach ache is not going to disappear, the old man is not going to become young, which is not necessary. When the truth is realized, right action takes place instantly without any confusion whatsoever.

If that factor is borne in mind, you'll also appreciate how, after a discourse lasting a number of days, Rama eventually gets up and says, "Right, now I'll do whatever you want me to do." And Vasistha says, "Go on, go and fight, get married, do everything, all that is necessary. Whatever has to happen, let it happen." You want freedom, freedom from what? Freedom from growing? It's not possible! Everything that is born must grow, a child must grow into a youth, a youth into an adult, an adult into an old man, that's life. This cannot be stopped. What sort of freedom do I want? I see that there is a problem here. Life is miserable, everything concerning life is miserable and I want to be free - from what? From life? That is not possible. From misery? What creates misery? I must know what it was that turned life into misery, into unhappiness. I must be free from that ignorance, or foolishness. Freedom from ignorance is real freedom. There is no other freedom. And at a later stage Vasistha asks, "Where is ignorance? Is ignorance something which can be presented, handed out, is it something like a pair of shoes?" Now, when we talk of moksha or liberation, how does one attain this moksha? What are the essential ingredients of liberation? How do I know how to get this liberation? Will somebody give it to me? I see that whatever other people give me becomes a nuisance. People give you money, it causes problems; people give you buildings, they cause problems; people

give you a boy or a girl, he or she causes problems. Whatever somebody else gives you, turns into a problem, and if you give moksha to me, it is your property, not mine. I don't even know what to do with it. And I will also be frightened that you may take it back. So it is not something which can be given; it has to be realized. When the truth is realized, ignorance is gone and with it non-freedom has gone. When truth is realized, therefore, moksha is. When truth is realized, there is liberation.

There are some aids to moksha, and Vasistha describes them in a very beautiful way. Vasistha tells Rama that there are four gatekeepers to the kingdom of God, or moksha: samo, santosa, vicara and sadusangama. Since moksha is not a gift, something which one person can give to another, it has to happen within oneself. These are the four aids, or qualifications, which may create the necessary climate for this to happen.

"Samo is usually translated self-control or discipline, which really means a state of inner tranquillity. If the mind and the heart are not absolutely calm, truth is not reflected in it, confusion continues. Confusion continues, creating more confusion. If the mind is agitated, then what the mind perceives is also agitated. When the mind is absolutely calm, then in that peaceful mind, truth is best reflected. Any agitation, even in the name of a spiritual agitation, is useless, is dangerous. "I'm restless for God-Realization." Until that restlessness stops, there is no God-Realization. You can go from pillar to post, you can knock your head against a million stones, you can bleed, but till the mind comes to a stop, self-realization is not possible.

One of the most essential characteristics of a true spiritual seeker is santosa. "Santosa" is contentment. That is, a mind in which there are no cravings, because when there are cravings, there must be agitation, and when there is agitation, there is disturbance, you're not able to reflect the truth. "Vicara" is loosely translated enquiry, enquiry, not in the intellectual sense, but a steady and proper movement, efficient movement. "Cara" in Sanskrit means move, "vicara"

means move very efficiently. Very efficient movement is vicara. Very efficient movement of consciousness, so that nothing is taken for granted, nothing is assumed, and there is persistent movement of awareness towards the truth, vicara. And in order to feed this vichara, in order to ensure that this vicara moves in the right direction, the fourth is suggested: sadusangama, or satsanga. It is in satsanga that this lamp of vichara is kept bright and fed with the right kind of fuel, to keep it alive. With the help of these four, santosa, samo, vicara and satsanga, it is possible for one to create an inner climate in which the truth can be realized efficiently.

II

The teachings of Vasistha in response to the dejection of Rama constitute the Yoga Vasistha. The background is very much like the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna falls into a state of depression or despondency. If this despondency is not there, then the teaching does not seem to have a real value. When do I become despondent? When what I regard as unhappiness has somehow become real. Whether it is really real, or only psychologically real, imaginarily real, somehow or other it hits me as real. Not when I'm theorizing, not when we are delivering a lecture, saying, "All the world is full of misery." That's only a lecture, there is no felt truth in it. The felt truth is that I am unhappy, whether, according to the spectator, it is really so, or, according to you, I am in an imaginary misery. For instance, if I have cancer, and I'm crying, you think I have a reason to cry, that my misery is justified, it is based on reality. When on the other hand I get miserable because there is a change of government in Canada, psychologists will say that it's an imaginary thing, it's a neurosis. Ignorant is the word. But the fact remains that whether this unhappiness is based on reason, according to you, or based on no reason, according to you, I am miserable. I am really and truly miserable.

It needs a real state of depression or despondency to appreciate the truth, appreciate the teaching. I must get there, I must hit the bottom, and then I can only come up, I cannot go down further. This must be experienced within myself, really and truly, whether, according to you, it is real or imaginary. That is, I must reach the end of my own journey, my own tether. And it is there that there is true bewilderment, it is there that I can truly say, "Lord, I cannot find the way, please help." Then the help comes. That is the teaching, the teaching of Vasistha here, or the teaching of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. And so Vasistha enters into a dialogue or vichara, an enquiry into the nature of reality, because it is insisted on again and again and again, that your unhappiness arises from ignorance.

That concept is not very easy to understand: that all unhappiness springs from falsehood, from ignorance. (Falsehood and ignorance are synonymous terms.) What is real does not cause unhappiness, only what is unreal causes unhappiness in a state of ignorance. It's a funny and tricky statement.

Let's go back to Rama's discourse. Rama says life is miserable, because we go on living, we chase after something or other, and then we grow old and we die, and all this is misery, disease, unhappiness. But does growth in fact produce unhappiness? Does the fact that I'm a grown man, that I'm no longer a child, does that in itself cause unhappiness? No. The process of growing is not unhappiness. But disease - does disease in itself cause unhappiness? Pain, perhaps yes. But unhappiness?

Unhappiness is a psychological factor, not a physiological factor, not a neurological thing. Pain, yes, of course. But if you watch yourself when you are sick, for instance, the physiological pain is hardly 5% of the problem. The other 95% is psychological. "Why must it happen to me? What will they think of me now?" That's 95%. Does your sickness demand that? No. The fact you are old is just a fact. It is not responsible for your unhappiness, or psychological condition. The fact that the body is undergoing some change, which the doctor calls sickness, does not demand unhappiness in the mind. If the body is tired, lie down and sleep! Even a violent headache does not produce psychological unhappiness. It can cause pain, yes, of course.

Pain and pleasure are inherent in your constitution. The nervous system responds one way in a painful condition and another way in a pleasurable condition. That's all. Does what is real cause unhappiness at all? No.

There is no problem at all, nothing which is real in creation causes unhappiness. Unhappiness always springs from falsehood. So what is ignorance? Ignorance is that mentality which considers this falsehood to be somehow real. So, in a state of unhappiness, I pursue that, I enquire into that: what exactly do I mean by unhappiness? Where is unhappiness in this? It doesn't exist at all. So I go on enquiring into it: how does unhappiness arise? Unhappiness arises when there is an image in my mind of what I'm supposed to be. Unhappiness arises when I want to do what it is impossible to do. There is an imaginary existence, a hope and a fear which are unrelated to fact. This is one aspect of this thing called falsehood or ignorance. Falsehood is that which does not exist. Falsehood is a name, is a word that denotes something which does not exist. I hope you heard it properly. Falsehood is a word, it is no more than a word, because if something which can answer to the description of falsehood exists, it is not false! If you can pick up this and say this is false, then this is, it is not false, it is real. So falsehood is nothing more than a word which denotes something which is not real.

What does this mean? It means that all our hopes and our aspirations, all our imaginations, all our thoughts and all our ideas and all our ideals, all these are covered by that one word, false because you cannot possibly produce these things, you cannot possibly say, "Here it is." So all that; I love you, I hate you, I'm afraid of you, I'm jealous of you, the whole lot, is just false. I cannot produce it. They are merely imaginings.

And yet when something is imagined - as an imagination it is real! Watch carefully. As an imagination it is real. If you are drunk and if you are suffering from some kind of a hallucination, the hallucination is real only as hallucination. The hallucination is not unreal, but the hallucination is not real either. The hallucination as hallucination is real; but in a state of ignorance you think that what you hallucinated is

itself the reality. Now, I think you understand what ignorance means. Ignorance is not ignorance of something. I don't know how to play the harmonium. That's not the ignorance we are talking about. In a state of ignorance, that which is merely hallucination or imagination is considered to be a reality. What you call unhappiness arises in this confusion.

When you investigate into the nature of this phenomenon, and realize that this is hallucination - I'm not denying the fact that something is seen, but that is hallucination, not reality - instantly that 95% is gone, all the unhappiness is gone. The pain is left, pain we'll deal with, that's the 5%, that's no problem. It doesn't create a serious problem at all, and in fact if it is not a physiological thing, there is no pain at all. For instance, if you call me an idiot, you and I know that the word idiot means that I don't have brains, that I am a fool, and it also means probably that you are annoyed with me, that you don't like me. I understand all that, but where is unhappiness in this? I understand the word. I understand the meaning, I understand the implication, I understand even the possibility that you don't like me. None of these demands that I should be unhappy, except when something else, an idea, arises in me, that that means disaster to me, that if you don't like me, it is disastrous. "I hope you like me." That creates unhappiness. There is no unhappiness at all in seeing this as it is - as the truth. In this there is absolutely no cause for unhappiness, unless what is totally unreal creeps into it. And what is the unreal thing? I feel my honour, my dignity, my prestige, is shattered. Remember, I cannot see where my prestige is, I cannot see where my dignity is. And so something which does not exist is shattered. That is what causes unhappiness. That is false. Something which doesn't exist. This is number one.

So when enquiry continues in this manner, on investigation the false, which was assumed to be real, is seen to be false. That which disappears on investigation is false. And the investigation itself, being based on knowledge, cancels ignorance, so that that which arose and existed in ignorance is dispelled by vicara. Vicara is the total sadhana or

spiritual practice recommended in the Yoga Vasistha. I entertained a hope, I had a fear, I had an idea which gave rise to this unhappiness. If I had not hoped that I would live for 2000 years, I would not be afraid to die today, tomorrow. If I had seen the truth then there would have been no problem. Because I entertain an idea, I become unhappy.

What is it that entertains this idea? What is this thing called "I", what is this thing called "me" ? This enquiry is the next step. When you have arrived at an understanding of the ideas themselves and their nonexistence or falsehood, which means that you recognize them as ideas not reality, then you turn round and have a look at this thing called "me". "I" thought so, "I" felt so, "I" was hurt. What is it that gets hurt? And as an extension to this: what is it that considers one experience as happiness and another experience as unhappiness? One situation as success and another as failure? One as praise or glory and the other as disgrace? Who is the "I"? Is there a little god or angel or demon stuck in some part of the anatomy - we don't know where it is - which could be identified as "this is me"? It's not possible.

Take this body. This is the nose, these are the ears, this is the head. You chop them off and throw them away, one by one, even the inner parts of the anatomy. Yet you soon discover that you have never thrown something called "I" away, the ego away. Alright, then, we come to the psychological analysis. There are thoughts, and there are feelings, there are emotions, there are experiences of pleasure and pain, and so on. And there is a mind and a certain intelligence. When you have done with all that, what do you call "I"? You haven't been able to find it! If "I" itself does not exist, how does "I" feel, or think, or love, or hate, be happy, or unhappy? So first we discover that what are called unhappiness and happiness are false, and secondly we discover that what is called "I" is also false. And therefore the whole expression "I am unhappy" is finished. It simply disintegrates. There is not a thing called "unhappiness", and there is not a thing called "I". Then what is "I am unhappy"?

In a manner of speaking, perhaps, one can say that what

is called "I", or the ego, is a bundle of memory, a collection of memory. What is called the "me" is nothing but the first two letters of that word "memory", an abbreviation of the word memory! Is there a thing called me, I, ego, apart from memory? "Me" is merely memory. All these experiences which have been floating around seem to have condensed and become coalesced into a thing called "me". Experiences which are there in life - coalesce and seem to assume the stature or the character of a "me". So the "me" is non-different from the aggregate of the experiences themselves.

Some philosophers called Vedantins have a lovely argument, that that which ties these experiences together is the ego. Even that may not be. It may not be true that that which ties these experiences together and makes them a recognisable bundle is the ego. There is an analogy in the Yoga Vasistha: a wood cutter chops wood and then ties the pieces together with a cord made of wood fibre. From where did he get the cord? From the wood. With the same wood you tie your bundle of firewood and that is called a bundle. But that which brought these pieces of firewood together is also firewood. So that it need not be an agency other than what it binds. In the same way, I, am made of all these experiences, but the "I" that binds all these experiences together in order to form a personality need not necessarily be an entity other than those experiences. The experiences themselves, when they come together, suddenly assume the nature of personality.

This is also easy to explain in terms of physics. You have a substance. A substance is made of molecules, and whether you are going to call it bronze or rock or something else depends entirely on the nature of the molecules. If it is a certain molecule you call it carbon, or iron, or salt. And the molecules themselves are made of atoms which distinguish one another by the components of the atoms. These atoms come together and form the molecules. And the molecules come together and form the substance. Is there a binding force, other than the molecules themselves and the atoms themselves, that keeps them together? No. They are just floating there and those molecules sit there: you call it Swami Sivananda. Ramana Maharshi would

also step in here and say that that does not say, "I am Sivananda"; it is your mind that says this is Sivananda. To an agglomerate of the molecules, the mind in a state of ignorance gives a certain name, and the mind in a state of ignorance attributes a certain form. The form is conjured up only by the limited sight. We see things as we see them, only because of the natural limitation of the sense of sight. If that limitation is changed, the whole thing becomes different, the whole world becomes different. To an ant you are a mountain, to a mountain you are a mouse. So all these things depend upon what you call the point of view. Since the view is limited, the perception is distorted. What is "I"? "I" is nothing but a bundle of memory, and that bundle of memory continues to respond to the present situation in a certain way.

If you observe this very carefully, there is no need to cancel anything. Vasistha does not say that the yogi must smile when his head is cut off and cry when somebody gives him food. Nothing need be cancelled, but one should recognise that it is that bundle of memory that responds to the present situation in a certain way, and there is no I, no ego in it. The ego is totally non-existent. The bundle itself is made of experiences which are non-different from one another. What you call a pleasurable experience and what you call a painful experience are both experiences whose content is exactly the same. This is called a man and that is called a woman. The content is exactly the same, the same rubbish. It is not as though he is more precious than her or she is more precious than he. There is nothing. You chop up the whole thing and sell it in the bazaar, they will be worth exactly the same thing. Once that is realized, then falsehood, which is imagination, is recognised as falsehood; ignorance disappears. Ignorance disappears because ignorance was never there. Ignorance is not a thing, is not a substance. In the light of this investigation, ignorance disappears and falsehood is recognised as false, as a word, as an idea. Happiness is false, unhappiness is false. They are mere words. When the truth that these are mere words is recognised, there is the ending of unhappiness.

III

Experiences that arise in the course of life coalesce, come together, and what is known as the experienter, or one who responds, is born; that becomes a personality. It is usual to say that the binding factor is the ego, but it need not be so. The binding factor is none other than an experience in itself, which experiences bondage. That whole thing is the personality and that personality responds to the events in what is called now. In this confusion there is nothing called I, the ego. The ego is the only one that doesn't exist. Experiences exist, and they somehow seem to have come together forming a thing called a personality, and the whole thing has got consciousness as its base, because consciousness seems to be everywhere, that's all. Life goes on and in that life there are no problems, there is no unhappiness, at all. Because it is totally natural.

What is the content of this experience? And how are these experiences formed? One sees these two factors without any difficulty whatsoever. There is movement in the world, in the universe, in everything that is created, including the body. There is change, there is movement, which means energy. Movement means energy. Without energy there is no motion. And energy is never totally still. Energy means motion. If there is no movement at all, you cannot call it energy. And such a thing does not exist. Even when they talk of static and kinetic forms of energy, it's only in a relative sense. Static only means that I cannot perceive that the tape recorder is moving. A fellow is sitting absolutely still; "Absolutely still", that's how we put it. He's not absolutely still: terrific activity is going on in every cell of his being. But that I'm not aware of. I cannot see it, and therefore I call it static. Nothing is static!

What brings these molecules together to form what is called the body? What brings the molecules together to form what is called a banana? It is here that Vasistha is ruthless. Without wanting to get caught in all sorts of crazy theories of evolution - the moment you have a theory of evolution, you must answer the question, "Why is it so?". Then you come up

with a theory: survival of the fittest. And how do you know that this is the fittest? Because it has survived. It's an absolutely ridiculous argument. It's called in logic a circular argument, explaining one with the other and the other with the one. Vasistha totally avoids it. How did these things come together? He says they came together. What do you mean, how did they come together? Coincidence! It just so happened that two or three of these atoms came together and formed a molecule; don't ask why or how. Once that is formed, you have got all these sequential events. The first is fortuitous, that is, accidental, and then there is a sequence of events. You sow a seed, and the tree comes up, that's all. Why is it so? Because only that tree was there in that seed. That's all. Accidentally these things happened in the first place, or even now, and experiences are formed because all these particles of energy (we shall call it that way) are also endowed with consciousness or awareness. There is nothing that is unconscious in this world, just as there is nothing that is totally static, nothing that is totally insentient. If you think that this stone is totally insentient, Vasistha questions it. That's exactly like saying a man is absolutely still, it's not true. It is relatively true, it is not absolutely true. In the same way there is nothing totally insentient. In that stone, consciousness is asleep.

There is nothing absolute in this universe. In this universe everything is relative. Somebody is active and, in relation to that person, the other fellow is lazy. Somebody is very intelligent and, in relation to him, the other man is stupid, that's all. There is consciousness everywhere and energy everywhere, and the movement of energy brings all these molecules together. And when the molecules collide with one another, a certain experience is experienced, because all these are endowed with consciousness. And somehow or other certain experiences come together and get themselves tied into a bundle with another of their own kind, and what is called a personality is formed. So we are all masses of floating energy, held together somehow by the same energy, and these masses of energy are called personalities, for want of a better word. But in that, is there an ego-sense? No. The

ego-sense is only one of those little fibres with which this bundle is held together, it is not an independent thing. That is the one thing that is totally absent. The "me" doesn't exist. It is when, in ignorance, the bundle somehow assumes an independent individuality, that it thinks it is in bondage. It is not in bondage, it thinks it is in bondage. A thought arises, "I am in bondage." And from there on that bundle goes on thinking, "I am a fool," "I am a swami", "I am an idiot", "I am a great man", and all that. And since all these thoughts also arise in the sphere of consciousness, they are experienced. There is the confusion again.

All these notions arise in that bundle of chitshakti, energy and consciousness combined. That is life. When you suffer, you suffer. You don't suffer! You think you suffer. What happens to the body, I think happens to me. "I am this body, this body is mine." This is questioned consistently in the Yoga Vasistha. How can I say this body is mine? If this body is mine, why can I not produce two noses? I like it, I have two ears, why should I not have two noses? So if one catches cold the other is all right. If the body is mine, why should I not be able to do it? Or if the mind is mine, why can I not change the mind? Since I cannot do any of these, the body is not me and it is not mine, the mind is not me and it is not mine. Why is it so? Because there is nothing called me. The "me" is a non-entity, and this non-entity cannot work upon something which exists.

The wonderful thing in the Yoga Vasistha is that the existence of the body and the mind is not totally denied. They are sublimated into something else. The body as body exists, of course. But if this body is sleeping here, it does not come and say, "I am a body." The thought that this is a body arises in your mind, but, whereas that notion is wrong, that there is something here is not denied at all. What exists is not denied. So, the body is, the mind is, but the stupid notion that "I am the body" doesn't exist except as a notion, and the notion "the body is mine" is false.

If I'm flying through a dense dark cloud as I have often done in Madagascar, in Singapore and in Malaysia, can I say that

this is my cloud? And yet that is what we are saying all the time. I'm supposed to be a little jiva, or soul, stuck in the centre of my heart, and somehow the body is mine. I am in the body and the body is mine. It's a self-contradicting statement. If I dwell in the body, I must belong to the body, not the other way round. The cloud cannot say, "The sky is mine", but the sky may say, "The cloud is mine."

So it is possible for us to see that the body and the mind themselves are part of something greater and belong to something else. They don't belong to me. The "me" doesn't exist. It is what that Something (whether you call it cosmic consciousness, or cosmic energy, or God, Atman, Brahman) determines, that happens to this. Whatever is determined by That happens to this. The body then, is neither me nor mine. The mind is neither me nor mine. And when you enquire deeper into this, you realize that the "me" itself is not there. What is the content of these experiences and what is the content of even this concept called me? Nothing. Since there is no substantiality associated with the notion called me, it is nothing more than a notion, a notion being consciousness, an idea. And the idea, being non-different in content from consciousness, is consciousness. An idea arises in consciousness, okay, let it arise, no problem. And if you still want to use the word "I", go on using it, knowing that it is nothing more than a word. In the full knowledge that "mind" is nothing more than a word go on using it. There is no need to accept or to reject a word, a word is only a word. But on investigation it is realized that there is no truth or substantiality, there is no substance which corresponds to the notion called "I" and the notion called "mind": They don't exist. The body exists just as the material world exists, the body being part of the material world, the mind exists and consciousness exists, the mind being part of the total consciousness.

This consciousness itself thinks of itself as the universe. There is this cosmic consciousness, and movement in cosmic consciousness is what is called energy. Even they are not two completely different categories. Cosmic consciousness and movement in cosmic consciousness is what is known as energy. And this energy colliding and coming together produces what is called

experience, and those experiences happening in consciousness give rise to name, thought and form simultaneously. It's consciousness, there is energy moving in it, again without distinction or difference and that movement results in the collision of particles of energy, and when they collide, some form is formed. And when a form is formed, consciousness thinks, as it were, this is a swami, this is a man. All this is accidental coincidence. And the world is formed, the sun is formed, the moon is formed. As particles collide and bring about a form, the consciousness looks upon it, thinks of it in a certain way, that's all. And you is formed, I is formed, the tape recorder is formed, the tent is formed.

All this is perfect. But from somewhere, for some unknown reason, the notion called "I am", "I am this body" arises. That is the only genesis of mischief. How is it to be got rid of? What is to be got rid of? There is nothing to be got rid of! You can get rid of only that which is real. When this is something which doesn't exist as a substance, how can it be got rid of? So in the very effort to get rid of it you are creating it. This teaching is found only in the Yoga Vasistha.* Why are you struggling to get rid of it? In that you are creating it, giving rise to it. That is, when you say, "I don't want it", you are giving rise to the very thing you don't want. Leave it alone. Investigate this whole truth. I am unhappy, what is this unhappiness? And who is it that is unhappy? Why do I say "I" and why do I say "I am" and why do I say "I am unhappy"? If this enquiry is undertaken, one discovers that that which has never been, and is not, is non-existent, that's all.

Life is freed instantly. Life is freed from this ignorance. And freedom in life, which is called jivan mukti, does not suddenly bring about a radical change in one's physical appearance nor even in one's mental activity, and yet a tremendous and radical change has taken place.

* Note: Swamiji also mentioned the Ashtavakra Gita.

IV

Some experiences that just happen, accidentally, as it were, get together, again accidentally as it were, and for some unknown reason a thing called a personality arises. Trees grow, leaves sprout, and wind blows, they shake: there is really no cause and effect relationship in this, these things just happen. But for some unknown reason a thing called a personality arises. Why did I repeat that "for some unknown reason"? That is the main argument in the Yoga Vasistha, that since there is no reason, it didn't happen! Only the notion or the thought exists that it has happened, that I am a personality, and therefore something that has not happened is assumed to have happened, which is ignorance.

If you look at a building, a house, or even this tent, where we are seated is space. This space was there before, this space will be there for ever and ever. But now we call it a terrace or a building or a house. It's only a word. "House" has really no meaning, because the space in which we live, which is called a house, was there even before the walls were put up, and will continue to be there even after the walls have fallen down. Somehow here again you can see the accidental coincidence. It's an absurd thing. If I am built into the wall, then you can say something has happened to me. But no, I live where there is empty space. That is how the personality or the ego is born. But here, there is a problem. Since the personality is a mere aggregate of experiences, those experiences keep responding to circumstances, and the personality thinks, "I am doing this". And once the personality has assumed the doership of those actions, it also experiences further impact of external circumstances and divides them - these experiences I like, these experiences I don't like. Up to that point there is no danger, there is no risk. Since the personality has no reason to come into being, it has not come into being in reality, and so there is no problem. And a thing called a personality is supposed to have arisen, there is no problem either. The problem arises when this personality, which is merely an aggregate of diverse experiences, which just happens in the cosmos, begins to entertain ideas, "I like this", "I don't like this". From

there on there is trouble.

This false personality that has arisen, begins to divide. These I like and these I do not like. And these I desire. Why do I desire them? Because I like them. Why do I like them? Because I desire them. Here there is no sense either. They are desirable because I desire them, and why do I desire them? Because I consider them desirable. There is no sense at all in it. And I hate something, I dislike something. Why do I dislike something? Because it is undesirable. How do you know it is undesirable? Because I hate it. There's absolutely no logic in it and you can see also that even these are not stable. Something which you like today you dislike next year. Your friend of this year becomes your enemy of next year. And someone whom you dislike sometime ago becomes your wife now. It's a crazy thing, this business goes on, it has no rhyme or reason. All these are common experiences, there is no problem. Which means that this thing called likes and dislikes is neither in me nor in the object. It arises just like that because...no because! It is the fact that these things have no cause at all that makes them non-existent, according to Vasistha. They are not truth at all because to be truth there must be some reason for their coming into being. That is the whole theory of accidental coincidence.

These likes and dislikes are the worst enemies. What do they lead to? They lead to my running after what I like and running away from what I do not like. Because I think my happiness comes from those which I have chosen to like, and my happiness is threatened by these which I hate, and since I want to be happy, I am constantly pursuing something and constantly running away from something. But as I go on in this game, I find that it is useless. However much I try, I am still unhappy. And however much I flee from this unhappiness, it seems to run just two steps ahead of me. And by going on in this manner, this personality, which was born of ignorance, continues to entertain ideas, notions.

Here there is something very subtle and very tricky. The real experiences, the real movement in space, in consciousness, which is called life, seem to be totally independent of these

notions "I like this", "I don't like this." And when this personality entertains notions saying, "I want to avoid this unhappiness," "I want to get that happiness," it soon finds itself saying, "Well, since this circumstance doesn't seem to be suited to my being happy, I will change those circumstances." But I cannot change those circumstances.

Unable to deal with this, this notion called a personality raises within itself another notion called, "I have overcome this trouble," or "I am going to overcome this trouble," "Now I'm going to practise yoga, I am going to go into samadhi," and that's another notion. "I'm rid of all these problems, I am now an enlightened being," another notion, or it says, "I still want to enjoy life, so I will be born not in this kind of silly society but as a king." Life goes on, it is totally untouched. And since what this notion entertains is itself notional, it is not a reality. The fool who sits on the throne is still a fool, absolutely a total idiot, but somehow he thinks he is somebody other than me or you. And that "I am a king," or that "I am a wealthy man," or that "I am a swami," is nothing but an idea in the mind of this stupid thing called personality which is itself born of ignorance and is therefore a non-entity.

What is missing here? The recognition that since this whole wretched thing is born of ignorance, we must attack the ignorance. That we are not prepared to do, somehow. We want to rectify, modify, reform our problematic existence. "Reform" means keep the same stuff, keep the same ignorance, and put it into a different shape. As if changing the shape is going to change the substance! This substance is still the same, but we merely change the shape and pretend that we have solved the problem - till the problem arises again. It was never really tackled. And so this personality, which is nothing but the product of an idea of ignorance keeps on changing its notions within itself.

That is what we call reincarnation. The whole theory of reincarnation is beautifully dealt with in the Yoga Vasistha. For instance, a couple had ten sons - they were very good people. And the sons were deeply devoted to them, and they died. When they die, these sons are heartbroken. They say, "What must we

do now that the parents have gone? Well, they have gone alright, but at least we should become something. We should get a job, but that is unending, What shall we aspire for? We can become a king, but that's useless. Fifty years later we are thrown into the dust. We can become a god, but even that's useless, there is still somebody on top, Indra. Why not become Indra? Well, even if I am the chief of the gods, that also comes to an end. What does not come to an end?" "Brahma," he said. "The creator of the universe, because he lives at least as long as the universe lasts, he creates it and he dissolves it. Good, we should all become creators, all ten of us." How do all ten of them become creators? What is the technique? The eldest of them said, "I'll tell you the technique, meditation. Tremendous, whole hearted, whole souled meditation. Sit down, contemplate, 'I am the creator, my head is the sky, my shoulders are the two ends of the universe, in my abdomen there are all these millions of stars' Contemplate like that and go on till you realize it. That means till this has become a reality." What happens? You go on sitting like this. Now, you must be very careful, otherwise you'll miss the joke. Here is Swami Venkatesananda, nothing more serious than that, sitting contemplating, "I am the creator of the world." The body is there according to you, according to me it is not there. Because the personality is contemplating, "In my abdomen is the whole vault of the heavens with millions of stars. My head is in the highest heaven, my shoulders are the ends of the universe." Because I was so keen, and so determined I went on, and in the meantime the body disintegrated. When the body disintegrates, what exists in that space? That notion, that thought exists in that space, it has become so powerful, and in that space itself that personality in which I thought "I am the creator of the universe" experiences being the creator of the universe, as if it were a fact. And in this manner we go from one embodiment to the other, without ever realizing that the whole thing is a big joke, that we should right in the beginning have investigated this mystery and tried to see if this personality is real or not real. Such an investigation must inevitably lead us immediately to enlightenment. Is it possible for us, after having heard all this or read all this, to bluff

ourselves, saying, "I am enlightened?" If you are enlightened, says Vasistha, then these three will become completely absent - likes and dislikes and fear. For as long as there is desire and hate and fear in the heart, there is no enlightenment.

V

In the Yoga Vasistha all types of yoga practices are mentioned. Meditation of a variety of forms, karma yoga, different types of bhakti, penance or austerity - all these are mentioned. There are even very beautiful instructions on diet and medical treatment. But for enlightenment, if we understand even the word correctly, none of these things has any direct connection. If enlightenment means "light", which means the dispelling of darkness, none of these things has any direct relation. This does not mean that they are useless. In order to have enlightenment you may even have to have a cup of tea! But this is unrelated to enlightenment. You're drinking tea to keep your blood liquid, not in order to attain enlightenment. You are eating in order to keep the body alive, not in order to attain enlightenment, not directly. You may attend satsang, study, all this; they are not directly related to enlightenment. Enlightenment is had by enlightenment. How does one wake up? By waking up. You can have an alarm clock. You can ask your husband, your wife, or your servant to beat you up, not just wake you up; but you may still not wake up. So how do you wake up? There is only one way, wake up. How do I become enlightened? When there is light, there is enlightenment.

There are however indirect aids to it. Enlightenment is had only by enlightenment, which is the correct and total and perfect understanding of the truth. And this is not an action, but the removal of ignorance. Correct understanding of the truth does not mean that I must go and study this Yoga Vasistha six times. But the understanding of it is brought about by the dispelling of the ignorance which gave rise to a

thing called personality, and only that goes, nothing else goes. There is a tent here, there is a terrace, there are some of us sitting here. If it is dark, we don't see one another, but when the light is put on, we see one another. We were not created when the switch was put on, we were there before, even in darkness. Nothing whatsoever changes except that the light is on. This has to be very clearly understood. Enlightenment means just that, nothing else. The light is on.

In that light a very simple truth is seen in all its simplicity. And that is the destruction of vasana. How do experiences immortalize themselves? Where do they leave an impression? How does an experience become a memory? This is of vital concern. Why? Because if the experience leaves an impression and that becomes memory, from there it is that memory that acts, not you, not that fresh experience. You drink a cup of tea today, and you say, "Ah, it's not as good as the tea I had in Rishikesh," which means you're not drinking this tea at all. You're not even tasting this tea. It is the experience left behind by the Rishikesh cup of tea that is tasting the present cup of tea. The present is completely lost. This experience is not had at all by the intelligence. It is quite different in the case of the enlightened. There is this awareness or intelligence everywhere, and there is movement in that awareness which is prana or shakti or chit shakti, and it is the combination of these two that forms experience. Now that is the experience of intelligence, brahmajnana; but in our case this intelligence does not operate. In its place it is the memory that operates so that I am not experiencing, or rather, the experience is not there. It is merely that old memory reacting to the present circumstance. Lived thus, the life becomes totally meaningless.

So I must discover what causes an impression to be formed. What is an impression? How does an experience leave an impression? How is memory produced? And if I know this, I can, (you understand the "I can" is not there, but words are words) find a way of ending this impression being formed. I can realize when the past impression reacts in the present. And when that impression is looked into, it is seen clearly that the impression itself was merely a notion that arose in pure consciousness,

in the pure mind. There was an experience, that created a movement in consciousness; that's perfectly alright, but somehow there was an idea or a notion of permanency in it, that somehow became permanent. One sees from one's own life that not all experiences leave similar impressions behind. There is something which I do not know, which suddenly springs up and says, "This is an important experience, I must remember it." It is that which later pretends to be an ego; otherwise there is no ego. The enlightened person sees the reality as it is. The personality is made up of all these memories and the memory itself is nothing more than an idea of a past experience which one pretends exists for ever. But your past experience does not exist now. It is dead and gone. What remains now is what you call memory, which is a vague idea of the experience I am supposed to have had sometime ago.

If you take a movie film of some experience you had some time ago, and while someone else is replaying that movie in the next room, you narrate your experience now, it is not the same. Some details are omitted, some imaginary details are added on. It's never the same. The mind plays its own tricks in the meantime. So I see that memory is not completely factual, its content is basically the same mind and the same consciousness, and there is an idea that I experienced this. "I had the experience" really amounts to, "I am that experience, I am that which thinks it had this experience." I don't even know that the experience was real. So it is only a notion. "I had this experience" survives now and spoils the whole thing. What is its content? Its content is pure consciousness or mind which has for the moment taken the form of this idea of a memory. Even this memory is not so rigid and fixed and factual and all that as we pretend. Memory is totally unreliable.

So one doesn't know what all this means, and the yogi is not interested in all that. The yogi is interested in the fundamental thing. What is its substance? What is the truth? What is the reality? Nothing but consciousness, with an idea of a thing supposed to have happened. When the yogi sees this, the I is gone, the ego is melted away. That is enlightenment. Then memory does not act. In fact, memory does not act in our case

either. No memory can act in our case, but we are caught in the idea that it does and therefore get into endless trouble. So in the case of the yogi, the memory doesn't act, and he knows it doesn't act. When the memory acts, as for instance in the case of a habit, which is (in the case of the yogi) more physical than psychological, he knows that this is the function of memory. Every time you drive a car you don't go and ask a mechanic, where is the clutch and where is the brake. You have already learned it, and memory operates there; that is quite in order. That is the function of memory, memory has its own role to play. While talking memory comes into play. You're talking in a certain language, all that comes from memory. But deeper than that, in personal relationship, in his view of the world and in his experiences, the yogi does not allow memory to interfere. It's not its province at all, it's not its role.

Then all experiences become new. The present experience is totally new, unrelated to anything past, unrelated to anything in the future. Then you become like the sky, like the plants, like air, not receiving any impression. Air does not receive any impression. You burn sandal wood here, it's very nice, it gives a lovely smell for a few minutes and then it is gone. The entire nature is like that - a tree grows, and it decays, it dies, it's gone. No impression is ever left in nature. In nature nothing natural leaves an impression behind. All experiences are experienced for the time being, and when the experience leaves, that's the end of it. No trace is left, and therefore there is no "me" in the yogi. When the memory goes the "me" is also gone.

Four things are mentioned as possible aids to this enlightenment. First adhyatmavidyadhigamah: relentless pursuit (that's not quite right) relentless seeking (and that is not quite right) of self-knowledge. The yogi is constantly engaged or involved in self-knowledge.

The second aid to enlightenment is sadhusangama, constant company with holy men, or women, or books, so that the mind, which is a bundle of memory, is not allowed to slip back into the state of ignorance. Otherwise this kind of meeting is of

no use at all. In sadhusangama or satsanga, the idea is that the mind is not allowed to slip back into the state of ignorance. One is constantly reminded that that is not it, this is it; this is the truth, not that. The third aid is vasanasam-parityagah, that is, the abandonment of immortalising memory. It is at the moment when an experience leaves an impression, becomes a memory that the "me" is formed, and it is that "me" that wants to perpetuate a certain experience, whether it likes it or dislikes it, whether it is a pleasant or an unpleasant experience. Vasana is not even a memory, it is only an idea. Vasana means an impression, vasana means the mental conditioning, vasana means a tendency, and vasana also means a fragrance. You light an agarbati here and the scent is wafted away. As long as it is there, it is there. And it goes. But in my case it carries on, it determines later how I act and how I experience life. That must be ruthlessly abandoned. This means its truth as a non-existent myth must be really seen, and in order to see that you need the inner light.

The fourth aid is called pranaspandanirodhanam. The only yoga practice, according to the modern definition, that is strongly recommended in the Yoga Vasistha is pranayama. The pranayama of the Yoga Vasistha is fairly complicated, not merely inhale, exhale, and hold: it is correct and immediate understanding of the movement of prana. Where does prana vibrate? How does prana vibrate? How do the cells even of this body live? And to what extent does the vitality of the body, or the vital essence of this body, or the prana circulate. It is a very complicated thing. That is the only physical practice that is recommended. But what is most essential is an understanding of the movement of the life-force, not merely the breath. How is life maintained? What is life? What does life mean? What keeps it going? Vague theories are not enough - it must be understood immediately. And without complicating it further by reforming this, or trying to change it, can one directly and immediately understand it? Then there is immediate enlightenment.



Lord Venkatesa